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# Vocational Call as an Alternative Pathway to Career Decision: A Phenomenological Study

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Vocational Call as an Alternative Pathway to Career Decision: A Phenomenological Study

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
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2008

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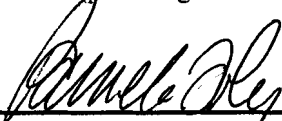
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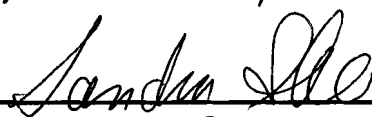
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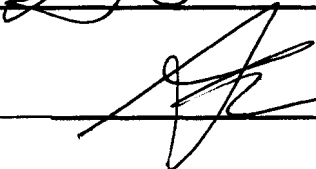
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## ABSTRACT

### VOCATIONAL CALL AS AN ALTERNATIVE PATHWAY TO CAREER DECISION: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Research has suggested a relationship between religion and career decision. However, little is known about the process through which religion influences career decision, particularly for those who view their careers as a calling. Furthermore, most of the research on calling and career decision has been with Protestants. Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to extend the knowledge of vocational calling with lay Catholics as well as explore how this population experiences and discerns a call to a career. The study used a phenomenological qualitative methodology. Seven participants who reported experiencing a call from God to a career engaged in face-to-face interviews.

Among the key findings were that the participants defined a calling as using one's gifts to serve God and His people, and the participants had a sense of being pulled toward their calling. Although the participants' definition of calling was rooted in Catholicism, a significant finding was that most of the participants had a period in their lives of questioning their faith. The questioning of their faith was a difficult and painful process for them because they were raised Catholic. As a result of questioning their faith, some of the participants did not initially follow their calling even though they had known their calling quite early. This led most of the participants to feel a sense of unhappiness, along with an ongoing sense of being pulled back.

Returning to the Church led these participants to follow their calling as well. However, some continued to struggle to determine which area within their calling to follow. Prayer was one of the resources the participants used to either find their overall calling or the area within the vocation to pursue. Two of the participants combined their faith with information they received

from a career center to find their calling. Following the calling led to a sense of happiness, although some participants reported stress due to initial disapproval from family members. The study will assist psychologists and career counselors in understanding the process through which the participants experienced a calling as well as helping religious clients in discerning their vocation.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There have been many people who have helped me through the journey of completing this study. First, I am indebted to the 7 participants. I appreciate your time and commitment to the study. Learning about your tribulations and perseverance to follow your calling is truly inspirational. I am also grateful to my two research assistants and my peer debriefer. Thank you for your hard work and your eagerness in assisting me in this project.

Thank you to the members of my committee. Your assistance and support helped me to complete this study. To my advisor, Dr. Foley, it was a pleasure to have worked with you throughout my master's and doctoral studies. You were committed in helping me complete this project with your countless hours spent reviewing the study and providing me with suggestions. You taught me so many lessons as a researcher and clinician and in life in general. I am grateful for your guidance and will miss working with you. I am also thankful to Dr. Beitin, who assisted me in analyzing the data. There were moments when you were busy and you made the time to help me interpret the data. I appreciate your dedication.

I would not have made it through this journey without the support and love of my family. Mommie and Papi, you both made many sacrifices in order for me to reach my goals in life. You both spent many nights standing by my side and encouraging me as I was working on this study. Words cannot express how grateful I am to have you as my parents, and I love you both very much. I am also thankful to my brother, who paved the way for me to attend college and graduate school. You made me believe that I could attain my dreams; I love you.

I dedicate this study to my participants and my family. This project is for everyone who is in the process of finding and following his or her calling.

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

The traditional career decision-making process focuses on choosing a career that reflects individuals' abilities and ideals. This concept arises from trait-and-factor theories, such as Holland's person-environment (P-E) theory and the theory of work adjustment (TWA) (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Holland, 1997). In general, trait-and-factor theories propose that individuals' ideals and abilities reflect the working environment (Swanson & Fouad, 1999). When individuals' personalities reflect the working environment, then individuals will be satisfied in their jobs.

Holland and others have also acknowledged the role of values and ideals in the career decision-making process and as an important element of P-E fit (Judge & Bertz, 1992). One of the ways values are formed is through religion and spirituality. Religion and spirituality may shape people's perception of the world; as a result, these variables can influence individuals' behaviors and decisions.

While there is research that discusses the impact of religion and spirituality on career decision making, the existing research does not explore the actual process through which these variables influence occupational decisions. Further, for some individuals, religion or spirituality is central in the career decision-making process, rather than just an additional factor to consider. This study seeks to understand the specific ways religion and spirituality influence career decisions for those who have followed a spiritual or religious path to determine their vocation. The study might assist vocational

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psychologists in guiding religious and spiritual clients throughout the career decision-making process.

### *Religion and Spirituality Defined*

It is important to explore the meanings of religion and spirituality in order to understand their influence on career decisions. The terms religion and spirituality have often been used interchangeably. However, religion and spirituality are distinct terms that are connected. Pargament (1999) defines religion as a set of organized beliefs. These organized beliefs are the core principles of a particular religious denomination. Religiosity, or the degree to which individuals express a religious affiliation, consists of two forms: extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic religiosity refers to the social or externally expressed aspects of religion such as attending church events. Intrinsic religiosity refers to individuals living life in accordance with their religious beliefs (Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989). Spirituality, on the other hand, can be defined as having a meaningful relationship with a higher power (Pargament, 1999). In spirituality, individuals may not identify the higher power as God. However, for those who identify with a religious denomination such as Roman Catholicism, the higher power is referred to as God.

### *Research on Religion, Spirituality, and Career Choice*

There has been limited research on religion, spirituality, and career decision. However, the research has reported that religion and spirituality influence career decisions as well as people's perception of work. The ways in which religion and

spirituality influence career decisions have not been fully explored (Duffy & Blustein, 2005). This section will briefly describe the limited existing research.

Dik and Duffy (in press) wrote a conceptual paper that provided a definition for calling and vocation. The authors defined vocation as “an approach to a particular life role that is oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented values and goals as a primary sources of motivation” (p. 8). Dik and Duffy defined calling as:

a transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond the self to approach a particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation. (p. 6)

Although vocation and calling both pertain to purpose and meaning in life, there is a fundamental difference between the terms. In a calling, the life role is influenced by an “external source” (p. 8). The source can derive from God or another source as defined by individuals. In this study, the source of a calling will pertain to deriving from God.

Davidson and Caddell (1994) conducted a qualitative study to examine the influence of religion on perception of work with a sample of 1,869 participants. The sample was mostly Protestant, and the participants’ social class status was upper-upper-middle class. The results indicated that intrinsic religiosity leads individuals to perceive their work as a calling, rather than a career or a job. The results emphasized that attending church was not enough to influence the perception of an occupation as a call. Rather, in order to perceive an occupation as a calling, people needed to incorporate their religious beliefs into their lives. Intrinsic religiosity coupled with strong social justice beliefs

(aiding the disenfranchised), part-time employment, and work with others led to viewing work as a calling. Further information regarding part-time employment was not discussed by the authors. People who had high levels of education, income, and secure jobs, were employed full-time, and worked with others viewed their work as either a calling or a career. Gender differences were also evident. Men in this sample were more likely to perceive their work as a career compared to women, who were more likely to view their occupation as a calling.

In a study focused specifically on women, Sellers, Thomas, Batts, and Ostman (2005) examined the qualitative experiences of 13 women who reported being dually called to motherhood and a career. The participants were employees of a Christian university. The authors reported that the participants described their calling to a career as evoking feelings of passion as well as difficulty envisioning having a different career from what was currently being pursued. Some women reported receiving discouraging messages from others for having pursued their called career while caring for a family. The discouraging messages reported were in regard to women's roles, and specifically indicated that women's primary responsibility should be caring for their families, which supersedes a career.

Duffy and Blustein (2005) conducted a quantitative study on the influence of religion and spirituality on career self-efficacy and career choice commitment. The sample consisted of 144 undergraduate students at a Roman Catholic university, although the religious orientation of the students was not discussed. The results indicated that intrinsic religiosity and spiritual awareness modestly influenced participants' self-confidence in making a career decision. Spiritual awareness and intrinsic religiosity were

predictors of career self-efficacy. Religion and spirituality slightly influenced career choice commitment. However, extrinsic religiosity was the only variable that contributed to career choice commitment in terms of settling on a career. The authors suggested that people who were considered to possess extrinsic religious traits sought social gains and as a result settled on a career.

Duffy and Sedlacek (2007) conducted a quantitative study to explore the relationship between calling and career development. The sample consisted of 3,091 college freshman. The results of the study indicated that the search for a calling may lead to career indecision, which may be the result of a lack of available resources. The presence of a calling may lead to knowing one's career path and being comfortable with the decision. However, it is unknown how the presence of a calling contributes to a career decision and feeling comfortable with the decision.

In New Zealand, Lips-Wiersma (2002) conducted a qualitative study to explore the influence of spirituality on career choice and transition or change in careers, in a sample of 16 participants. The sample identified with various religions such as Catholic and Indian spirituality. The results of the study indicated that spirituality influenced people's career decisions. Moreover, the author identified four occupational purposes. The first refers to introspection as a process through which individuals may determine who they are in terms of their own talents. The second purpose was serving others. The third referred to interacting with coworkers who shared similar values. The final purpose was fulfilling individuals' needs, which was not clearly defined or discussed by the author. In addition, the participants believed that God wanted them to pursue a specific

career. The participants reported that they had a desire to serve God and prayer was a source of strength and guidance.

Constantine, Miville, Warren, Gainor, and Lewis-Coles (2006) conducted a qualitative study on the influence of religion and spirituality on career development. The sample consisted of 12 African American undergraduate students. The religious affiliations of the participants were diverse, ranging from Catholicism to Seventh-day Adventism. The study suggested that religion and spirituality influenced career development. For example, most of the participants reported believing that God had a plan for their lives that included career choice. Most of the participants also indicated a desire to serve others through their vocation or career. In addition, most of the participants stated that they engaged in prayer, reading the Bible, and attending church services as a way to cope with academic and career-related obstacles.

Thus far, the articles that have been discussed have focused on paid work. However, volunteering can be included in the spectrum of work. While volunteer work can be considered a part of an individual's career, only one study has addressed the role of religion in this area. Mattis, Jagers, Murphy, and Murray (2000) examined the influence of religion, communalism, and social capital on volunteerism in a sample of 171 African American men. The results indicated that the participants who were actively involved in the church were prone to volunteerism. Increased church involvement led to greater hours of volunteer activities. Although the article focused on volunteerism and not traditional career decision making, volunteerism is considered a form of work. These studies will be discussed in further detail in chapter 2.

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### *Statement of the Problem*

Although the above studies found that religion and spirituality influence career decisions, the specific ways these variables contribute to occupational choice is not well understood (Duffy & Blustein, 2005). Due to the novelty of this area of research, the literature on the topic is exploratory. Further research is necessary to understand how religion and spirituality influence career decision, which this study seeks to address. This study will discuss the religious and spiritual beliefs of the participants as well as the resources employed when incorporating religion and spirituality into the career decision-making process, such as prayers, for example. Because of the focus on Protestant samples in the existing literature, the present study will expand the knowledge of religion and career choice by focusing on the process with Roman Catholics.

### *Significance of the Study*

This research has implications for vocational psychologists working with religious clients who are discerning their vocational (career) choices. First, information from the study can assist vocational psychologists in understanding the role of religion and spirituality in making career decisions. Although research has shown that religion and spirituality impact career decisions, it is not clear specifically how religion and spirituality influence occupational choice. The dissertation seeks to address this gap in the literature. If psychologists understand the role of religion and spirituality in occupational choice, then they can incorporate religion and spirituality in career counseling by exploring clients' religious and spiritual beliefs (Dik & Duffy, in press).

Second, information from this study can assist vocational psychologists in aiding clients in choosing careers that reflect their purpose and meaning in life (Dik & Duffy, in press). Third, discernment is one of the ways in which individuals can engage in introspection to determine how best to use their gifts to serve their community (Dik & Duffy, in press). One of the Catholic beliefs regarding work is that it reflects individuals' gifts, and these gifts are used to serve God and His people (U.S. Catholic Conference, 1994). Therefore, it is essential for vocational psychologists to understand how people engage in the discernment process to determine their vocations as well as support people throughout the discernment process (Dik & Duffy, in press).

### *Research Questions*

The questions to be addressed in this study are as follows: (a) What is the process by which individuals incorporate religion and spirituality into making a career decision? (b) How do people experience their unique call to a career? (c) What are the resources individuals use in discerning a call to a career? (d) How, according to the participants in the study, can vocational psychologists support individuals in the process of discerning their vocations?



### *Definition of Terms*

#### *Vocation*

Vocation is defined as experiencing a call from God (Rayburn, 1997), meaning following a life path as intended by God (von Wahlde, 2004). Vocation provides purpose and meaning in life (Dik & Duffy, in press).

#### *Calling*

The definition of a calling is similar to vocation in that a calling also provides meaning and purpose in life. However, the difference between a calling and a vocation is that a calling pertains to the life role being influenced by an “external source” (Dik & Duffy, p. 6). For this study, the source will be God.

#### *Discernment*

This is the process of determining the specific ways people can use their gifts to serve God and His people.

#### *Religion*

Religion is defined as a set of organized beliefs (Pargament, 1999). In this study, religion will be characterized as the participants’ self-identification of belonging to a specific denomination.

#### *Career Decision*

This is the process of choosing an occupation.

### *Overview of the Methodology*

This study will use phenomenological methodology. Phenomenology was developed by Edward Husserl, a philosopher (Creswell, 1998), and focuses on seeking the meaning of experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Finding the essential meaning of experiences occurs through the process of reflection. For a person to reflect on experiences, these experiences must enter the consciousness. Through this process, which the researcher guides through a semistructured interview, participants recognize the experiences in their lives they might have previously overlooked due to environmental distractions. Reflection aids participants in determining the meaning of their experiences.

### *Rationale for the Methodology*

Phenomenological methodology lends itself to this study because such a methodology provides information to vocational psychologists on the participants' thoughts, feelings, and meaning associated with the experience of being called to a career. The process and resources of being called to a career are also explored. In addition, qualitative methodology is useful when there is a lack of information on a specific topic, as is the case with research on how people experience a call to a career. Therefore, qualitative methodology allows information to unfold and for the researcher to gain understanding on this topic, which has been only sparsely studied. In addition, qualitative methodology has been chosen because there is a lack of available scales that measure vocation and calling that have adequate reliability and validity (Dik & Duffy, in press).

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### *Participants*

In phenomenology, the sample selection is purposeful. Purposeful sampling, rather than using a random process, involved recruiting participants who have experienced the phenomenon under investigation (Polkinghorne, 2005). This allowed me to determine the common theme or experience among the participants. Roman Catholics were recruited for the study because this population has not been adequately represented in studies on religion, spirituality, and career decision. Participants were recruited from a Roman Catholic church located in the Northeast. I received permission from the parish priest to make a brief announcement at mass to the parishioners in which I described and discussed the significance of the study. After mass, I provided the parishioners with a flyer that contained a summary of the announcement and my contact information. Participants who self-identify as experiencing a call to a career were recruited for the study.

### *Limitations*

The primary limitations of this study are related to the methodology. While phenomenology is an appropriate method for addressing this topic, there are several limitations. First, researchers who are using phenomenological methods cannot be completely absent of biases. Some level of bias will be present throughout the process. My personal experience of being called to a career might lead to bias in interpreting the participants' experience with the phenomenon. In phenomenology, biases are addressed by engaging in bracketing, which is also called epoche.

Bracketing helped me become aware of the influences and personal biases that prevent me from seeing the true essence of a particular experience (Lavery, 2003). Thus, I wrote my biases as they arose in a journal. However, bracketing did not alleviate my biases. It assisted me in becoming aware of my biases and their influence on my interpretation of the data. In addition, a member of my dissertation committee assisted me in extracting and interpreting the data. I also engaged in a peer debriefing in which I discussed the themes and the essence of the participants' experience of a calling based on the data. These techniques were helpful in decreasing the influence of my biases on the study. In spite of the techniques, qualitative research is always affected by the researcher's own characteristics and experiences.

Second, a purposive sample with Roman Catholics and adults limits the generalizability of the data to the broader population. Third, validity is also a concern for qualitative studies. Qualitative research lends itself more to external validity than to internal validity, which is a focus in quantitative methodology. The lack of internal validity has been one of the limitations in conducting qualitative research. Quantitative research relies heavily on tests; it is important that it measures what it intends to study. However, qualitative research relies on entering the participants' environment in order to understand the phenomenon or variables studied. Therefore, the validity of qualitative research is different from quantitative (Giorgi, 2002).

## CHAPTER II

### Literature Review

This chapter will discuss the current literature on vocational choice through a spiritual or religious call. Several studies in the area of career choice have reported that religion and spirituality influence career decisions (Constantine et al., 2006; Davidson & Caddell, 1994; Duffy & Blustein, 2005; Duffy & Sedlack, 2007; Lips-Wiersma, 2002; Sellers et al., 2005). However, these studies did not describe the process of incorporating spirituality and religion into making a career decision. In addition, existing studies did not specifically address the participants' religious and spiritual beliefs, which may affect the participants' perception of work and the reasons the participants chose their careers. Furthermore, most of the studies recruited mostly Protestant participants. This may be due to the misperception that a call to a vocation for Catholics is limited to religious life. However, Catholics may also feel called to nonreligious careers, and therefore, this population requires study. Finally, there is a need to address the ways in which religion and spirituality may also influence volunteerism (Mattis et al., 2000). Although individuals may have careers that do not involve directly serving others, such individuals may volunteer in organizations that offer assistance to others in need.

The chapter contains three components. The first part of the chapter explores the traditional career decision-making process. The second part of the chapter discusses the Roman Catholic perception of vocation. It is important to discuss the Catholic teachings on calling in order to understand its influence on career decisions. The third part of the

chapter reviews the limited existing psychological literature on religion, spirituality, and career decision making. The chapter concludes with a brief summary.

### *Traditional Career Decision-making Process*

#### *Person-environment Fit*

Trait-and-factor theory has been used in traditional vocational counseling to conceptualize people's career development and assist them in making a career decision. One of the trait-and-factor theories is Holland's theory of person-environment (P-E) fit. This theory proposes that people choose careers or work environments that reflect their personalities, talents, interests, and values. It is important that the work environment fosters individuals' expression of their personalities. When the work environment and the individuals' personality are congruent, then job satisfaction occurs (Holland, 1997).

Holland identified six personality types for individuals and work environments—Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional (RIASEC)—which will be briefly discussed below. The Realistic type pertains to those who enjoy “concrete and tangible things” (Holland, 1997, p. 21). Examples of occupations that reflect this personality are mechanic and electrician. Individuals with this personality style tend to be less open to altering their values, beliefs, and conduct. The Investigative type refers to those who have an interest in “analytical and abstract thinking” (p. 23). Occupations may include biologist and medical technician. Those identified with this personality style are typically open-minded in their value and belief systems. Artistic individuals are those who take pleasure in “self-expression and are imaginative” (p. 23).

Individuals with this personality type are also generally open-minded in their values and beliefs. Occupations may include writer and interior decorator.

Social types are those who “are very concerned with social problems and desire to serve others” (p. 25). Individuals with this personality type might have their values rooted in religion. Occupations may include psychologist and teacher. Enterprising individuals are those who are “persuasive and prefer leadership roles” (p. 25).

Enterprising occupational areas include sales and management. Individuals with this personality type tend to be less open about changing their value and belief systems.

Conventional types are those who are “structured and conservative” (p. 9). Conventional occupations may include bookkeeper and banker. Those with this personality style are not open to changing their value and belief systems. In reality, most occupations are coded as a combination of two or three Holland codes.

### *Theory of Work Adjustment*

Another trait-and-factor theory is the theory of work adjustment (TWA). Similar to Holland’s theory of person-environment fit, the theory of work adjustment indicates that individuals’ personalities reflect their work environments. Work adjustment is achieved when individuals’ skills, values, and needs, such as monetary compensation, are met in the work environment. When individuals’ needs are met and their skills reflect the requirements of the work environment, satisfaction may occur. In contrast, when individuals’ needs are not met at work, there is a greater chance for individuals to resign from their jobs and seek employment that reflects their abilities, skills, needs, and goals (Dawis & Lofquist, 1985).

### *Values*

In addition to personality traits and interests, individuals' values are an integral aspect of vocational counseling. Values provide a set of principles that guide behavior (Rokeach, 1973). Values are formed through individuals' interaction with the environment, for example, society and culture (Brown & Crace, 1996; Rokeach, 1973). Further, people typically prioritize their values, meaning some values are more important than others (Brown & Crace, 1996). The values that are most important influence behaviors and decisions such as occupational choice (Brown & Crace, 1996; Judge & Bretz, 1992).

In traditional career counseling, a vocational psychologist explores clients' interests, values, and personality styles through a structured interview and administration of an assessment battery. These assessments measure a range of areas that may include values (e.g., the Minnesota Importance Questionnaire [MIQ], Rounds, Henly, Dawis, Lofquist, & Weiss, 1981) and personality (e.g., the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator [MBTI], Briggs Myers, Kirby & Myers, 1998). The results of the assessments and information gathered from the structured interview aids the vocational psychologist in conceptualizing individuals' career development. As a result, the vocational psychologist can assist or guide people in choosing a career or work environment that reflects their personality styles.

Although values have been incorporated into the career decision-making process, religious and spiritual values have not been included in traditional career counseling. However, religion and spirituality may be one of the ways through which values are



formed (Lewis & Hardin, 2002). Therefore, considering the role of religious and spiritual beliefs throughout the career decision-making process is important for aiding people in choosing careers or work environments that reflect their values. Further, for some individuals, religious or spiritual values form the primary path to career decision making, including those who have discerned a more traditional call to religious vocation as well as those who have been called to nonreligious careers.

### *Catholic Vocation*

It is essential to discuss the Roman Catholic teachings on vocation in order to understand their influence on career decisions, which this study seeks to explore. In Roman Catholicism, there is a general concept of vocation that refers to following God's will (von Wahlde, 2004). Catholics/Christians are called to serve God. The call to a vocation is unique to individuals. An individual's vocation is reflective of the gifts and abilities that God has provided to him or her that may be exemplified through work. Work is one of the ways that individuals use their abilities and gifts to serve God and His people, which is one of the core Catholic beliefs regarding work. Individuals determine their vocations or how best to use their gifts by having a relationship with God (U.S. Catholic Conference, 1994). Development is important because "it is concerned with increasing each person's ability to respond to their vocation and God's call" (U.S. Catholic Conference, 1994, p. 650).

### *Psychology and Discernment*

The processes of discernment and traditional career counseling are similar. They both require individuals to engage in introspection. Introspection encourages people to reflect on their personal experiences, gifts, and values, which form identity (Neafsey, n.d.). It is important for individuals to become aware of their identity because vocation is a reflection of identity. The calling to a vocation is rooted in the individual's genuine identity. In counseling, the relationship with the therapist aids people in determining their genuine identity. On the other hand, in the religion-based discernment process, a relationship with God aids people in recognizing their genuine identity (Neafsey, n.d.). The methods used in career counseling and religious discernment may be different, but the ultimate goal of the counseling process and the discernment process is the same. The goal is to determine a vocation that reflects individuals' identities.

Neafsey (2004) pointed out that there may be moments of doubt or questioning whether people are following their true vocation. People may not be able to determine a vocation with absolute certainty. This may be the result of the messages people receive from society regarding specific vocations, which can influence the individuals' perception of their true calling. For example, there are careers or vocations on which society places a high value, which refers to occupational prestige. Zhou (2005) observed that careers that are "scientific and technical tend to receive higher prestige than those occupations that are less salient in this respect" (p. 130). Occupational prestige affects traditional career decision making as well as decisions made through the discernment process. Therefore, it is important for people to become aware of the influence of societal messages on the discernment and traditional career decision-making processes.

### *Religion and Career Decision*

This section will review the psychological literature on religion, spirituality, and career decision. There has been a general lack of research on religion, spirituality, and career decision. However, the limited research that has been conducted has addressed the influence of religion and spirituality on career choice and perception of work. The specific role of religion and spirituality in career decision and perception of work has not been fully explored.

Davidson and Caddell (1994) conducted a quantitative study on the influence of religiosity on people's perception of their occupation as a job, career, or calling. The authors defined a job as receiving money from a place of employment for services performed. The authors noted that people may change jobs for increased security and monetary compensation. A career was defined as being chosen by individuals, and they prefer to perform the responsibilities of a specific type of work for the remainder of their lives. The place of employment might change, but the type of work performed remains the same. A calling was defined as pursuing work that reflected people's life purpose regardless of the amount of monetary compensation. The study had 1,869 participants, the majority of whom were Protestant and were described as "upper-upper middle class." The authors did not define this term or provide any additional demographic information.

The dependent variables for the study were calling, job, and career. The participants were given the definitions, as described above, and chose the statement that best reflected their view of work (calling, job, and career). The independent variables were exchange theory and symbolic interaction. Exchange theory pertains to the working

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environment and the type of work individuals engage in. The following subscales measured exchange theory: employment status (full- or part-time), class (owner, managers), intermediate (professionals, administrators), work (white or blue collar), job security (high or low), public or private sector, family income (low or high), education (low or high), gender (male or female), and type of work (people or things). Symbolic interaction pertained to people being influenced by their environment, specifically “the groups they belong to and the people they interact with” (p. 137). People’s behavior was indicative of their perception of the world. Further information was not provided. The following subscales represented symbolic interaction: denominational norms and values (Calvinist and non-Calvinist religious beliefs), pastoral influence, sermon content, social justice belief (aiding the disenfranchised), religious salience, and religious participation. The reliability values for these scales were, respectively, .53, .83, .53, .63, and .50. There were two to four questions for each of the variables.

The descriptive statistics indicated that 60% of full-time workers viewed their work as a career, while 38% of part-time workers perceived their work as a career. Forty-five percent of the participants who were employed part-time viewed their work as a job, while 15% of full-time workers and 17% of part-time workers viewed their employment as a calling. The participants who worked in the public sector viewed their work as a calling or a career, 17% and 61%, respectively. Thirty-three percent of the participants who worked in the private sector viewed their work as a job (33%). Fifteen percent of the participants who self-identified as upper class viewed their work as a calling, 70% perceived their work as a career, and 14% viewed their work as a job. Fourteen percent of participants who self-identified with the middle class viewed their work as a calling, 57%

viewed their work as a career, and 29% perceived their work as a job. Eleven percent of the participants who self-identified as working class perceived their work as a calling, 28% viewed their work as a career, and 62% perceived their work as a job. The authors reported that people with higher levels of education were more likely to view their work as either a calling or career, while those with a lower level of education more often viewed their work as a job.

Further, the authors reported that pastoral influence, sermons, and affiliation with Calvinist Protestantism were not correlated with the participants' perception of work. The authors did not provide statistics regarding the above results. Twenty-seven percent of the participants who perceived their work as a calling had high levels of intrinsic religiosity (incorporated religious principles into their daily lives). Seven percent of the participants who viewed their work as a calling had low levels of intrinsic religiosity. Thirteen percent of the participants who viewed their work as a calling had medium levels of intrinsic religiosity. Individuals reporting Calvinist and non-Calvinist religious affiliations were not statistically different in their perception of work.

The authors conducted a discriminant function analysis to determine the specific predictors of an individual's view of work. Two significant discriminant functions emerged. The variables that were predictors in distinguishing among calling, career, and job for the first discriminant function were education ( $r = .79$ ), job security ( $r = .41$ ), income ( $r = .40$ ), specific kind of employment ( $r = .38$ ), work status ( $r = .35$ ), and work class ( $r = .30$ ). The second discriminant function indicated that social justice stance was a predictor in distinguishing work as a career or calling ( $r = .73$ ). Other predictors

associated with this function included intrinsic religiosity ( $r = .62$ ), church participation ( $r = .59$ ), kind of employment ( $r = .42$ ), and work status ( $r = -.37$ ).

The results indicated that people who internalized their religion were likely to view their occupation as a calling. The results emphasized that attending church was not enough to influence the perception of an occupation as a call. Rather, in order to perceive an occupation as a calling, people needed to incorporate their religious beliefs into their lives. Intrinsic religiosity coupled with strong social justice beliefs (aiding the disenfranchised) and part-time employment and working with others led to viewing work as a calling. Further information regarding part-time employment was not discussed by the authors. People who had high levels of education, income, and secure jobs, were employed full-time, and worked with others viewed their work as either a calling or a career. Gender differences were also evident. Men in this sample were more likely to perceive their work as a career compared to women, who were more likely to view their occupation as a calling.

A limitation of the study was the lack of a detailed description of the sample. Further information was needed to clarify the meaning of “upper-upper middle class.” In addition, the authors did not specifically discuss what constituted high or low education and family income, which were measured as part of exchange theory. Individuals’ perception of high and low income and education will impact their responses.

Another concern is that the authors asked the participants to identify whether they viewed their work as a job, career, or a calling based on a brief description of each variable. However, the authors did not indicate if the description of each variable was derived from a literature review or their own perception. One of the limitations of self-

report measures may be the lack of truthfulness of participants' responses. Some participants may not be forthcoming in their responses due to fear of others' reaction to their responses. Therefore, some participants might have been prone to choosing the socially acceptable response. Furthermore, the authors created questions to measure the independent variables' symbolic interaction and exchange theory. The subscales representing symbolic interaction had low reliability except for sermon content, and validity was not discussed. Moreover, the study was limited to people's perception of work, but did not address the process of choosing this work.

Sellers et al. (2005) conducted a qualitative study that examined the experience of women being dually called to motherhood and career. The sample was purposeful, meaning only women who had experienced the phenomenon of being dually called participated in the study. There were 11 participants in the study from a Christian university. The participants ranged from 34 to 54 years of age. All of the participants were Caucasian. Four women worked full-time while raising their children, 3 worked part-time and then full-time, 2 worked part-time, 1 was at home until her youngest child was 3 years old and then worked full-time, and 1 was home until the youngest child was 5 years old and then worked part-time. All of the women were Protestant.

The authors identified four clusters, or main themes. The first cluster was the meaning of a calling. The participants described a calling to a career in terms of reporting feelings of passion; and they couldn't imagine doing another job. However, the participants did not feel similarly called to motherhood. Some reported that they had always wanted to be a mother, but they didn't perceive motherhood as a calling in the same way as a career.

The second cluster/theme was formative messages. Nine out of 11 women had their mothers encouraging them to pursue a career due to either the mother's personal experience of incorporating work and motherhood or regret at not pursuing her career goals. Some women had role models who balanced both work and motherhood. Other women received discouraging messages of being dually called, such as a father alluding to his daughters that they were to maintain the household and become mothers. Despite these negative messages, these women incorporated a career with motherhood. Some women reported receiving discouraging messages from others for having pursued their called career while caring for a family. The discouraging messages reported were in regard to women's roles, and specifically indicated that women's primary responsibility should be caring for their families, which supersedes a career.

The third cluster/theme was lived experiences. Some participants discussed the challenge of balancing work and family. They reported social isolation and lack of friends due to spending time with their children after work. Since their free time was spent with their children, they didn't have the opportunity to socialize. One person experienced guilt for dividing her responsibilities. Other participants felt comfortable with their lifestyles. The fourth cluster/theme was wisdom for the next generation, which included the participants' suggestions for balancing work and career.

There were several limitations to the study. First, the authors recruited only Protestants, which limited the generalizability of the results. Second, the authors did not explore how the participants determined their calling to a career, which will be the focus of the present study.



In one of the few studies that may have included a large group of non-Protestant participants, Duffy and Blustein (2005) conducted a quantitative study on the influence of religion and spirituality on career decisions. The sample consisted of 144 undergraduate students at a Roman Catholic university. However, the religious orientation of the students was not discussed or analyzed in this study. The sample was 80% Caucasian, 7% African American, 4% Latino/a, 4% Asian American, 1% Native American, and 4% consisted of other ethnicities. The age range was 18 to 22.

The authors hypothesized that increased levels of spirituality and religiosity would account for career choice commitment and career self-efficacy. Career choice was defined as “committing and foreclosing” (p. 431) on a career. While career self-efficacy, referred to whether people believed they had the skills to make a career decision. In addition, spirituality was defined as having a relationship with a Supreme power. Whereas religion pertained to the adherence to the principles of a particular religious orientation, church attendance and “social reward of attending services” (p. 430).

The data were analyzed through multiple regression analysis. The results of the first multiple regression analysis indicated a modest relationship between spirituality and career self-efficacy. The overall model yielded an  $R = .294$  ( $p = .016$ ), which accounted for 5.9% of the variance. The beta coefficients for each of the variables in the model were the following: spiritual awareness ( $.32, p = .004$ ), realistic acceptance of God ( $-.02, p = .83$ ), disappointment in God ( $.02, p = .80$ ), and spiritual instability ( $-.16, p = .11$ ). Spiritual awareness was the only variable that was a significant predictor of career self-efficacy.

In the second regression model, there was a modest relationship between religion and career self-efficacy. The overall model yielded an  $R = .301$  ( $p = .01$ ), which accounted for 6.9% of the variance. The beta coefficients were as follows: intrinsic religiousness (.23,  $p = .007$ ), intrinsic religiousness social (-.05,  $p = .54$ ), extrinsic religious personal (-.17,  $p = .08$ ), and intrinsic religiousness moral (-.02,  $p = .84$ ). Intrinsic religiousness was the only significant predictor of career self-efficacy.

The results of the third model found a slight relationship among religion, spirituality, and career choice commitment. However, there was a modest relationship between extrinsic religiosity and foreclose. The overall model yielded an  $R = .327$  ( $p = .003$ ), which accounted for 8.1% of the variance. The beta coefficients were as follows: intrinsic religiousness (-.08,  $p = .34$ ), extrinsic religiousness social (.04,  $p = .64$ ), extrinsic religiousness personal (.33,  $p = .001$ ), and extrinsic religious moral (-.06,  $p = .57$ ).

The results of this study indicated that intrinsic religiosity and spiritual awareness modestly influence people's self-confidence in making a career decision. Extrinsic religiosity contributed to career choice commitment in terms of foreclosing on a career. The authors suggested that people who were considered to possess extrinsic religious traits sought social gains and may settle on a career "also to a means as an end" (p. 437). However, religion and spirituality overall had a minor influence on career choice commitment other than the aforementioned aspect of the variable.

The study had several limitations. For example, the sample consisted of undergraduate students, which limited the generalizability of the data to a broader population. Those who do not attend college may differ from undergraduate college students in career self-efficacy and career choice commitment, which was a limitation the

authors recognized. In addition, the majority of the students were Caucasian, which further limited the generalizability of the results. Furthermore, the undergraduate students may be considered a sample of convenience because one of the authors was a faculty member at the college where the participants were recruited. While the students were recruited from a Catholic university, the demographic form did not require the students to indicate their religious affiliation. Therefore, the potential effect of religious affiliation on career decision making cannot be fully determined from this study. Finally, the instruments used in the study were self-report, which involves the limitations previously discussed.

Studies of the relationship between religion and career choice have not been limited to U.S. samples. Lips-Wiersma (2002) conducted a qualitative study in New Zealand to explore the influence of spirituality on career choice and transition or change in career, in a sample of 16 participants. The participants were evenly divided between men and women. The majority of the participants were Caucasians with an age range from 40 to 50. The religious affiliations of the participants were as follows: Catholic (n = 2) Anglican (n = 2), Mormon (n = 1), Buddhist (n = 1), Quaker (n = 1), Baha'i (n = 2) Jewish (n = 1), Maori religion (n = 1), Indian spiritual guide (n = 1), and spiritual with no religious affiliation (n = 4). The author conducted interviews in which the participants discussed their career development. The author did not provide information about the interview protocol.

The study identified four occupational purposes. The first purpose was described as developing and becoming a self. The participants referred to this purpose as engaging in introspection as a process through which individuals may determine who they are in

terms of their own talents. The second purpose was serving others. One of the participants indicated the importance of serving God and His people in a meaningful career. The author indicated that serving others was not limited to social service occupations. For example, while supermarket jobs may not be traditionally viewed as a social service job, people who are employed in a supermarket may find meaning in their work and believe they are serving others by placing the customers' food in a bag. The third purpose was unity with others, which referred to interacting with coworkers who share similar values. Unity with others was defined only through interaction with others. The fourth purpose was fulfilling one's needs, which the author did not clearly define or discuss.

Another theme identified in this study was discovering and reevaluating different purposes in life. This pertained to reevaluating priorities or purposes, such as developing a sense of self, unity with others, serving others, and fulfilling one's needs. One of the participants mentioned the stress and responsibilities of having a business and believed he was "losing his perspective" (p. 512). He questioned his reasons for having a business and reflected on the importance of serving others. Furthermore, there was a theme of avoiding loss of equilibrium. When the participants experienced a lack of balance in their lives, the participants reevaluated their careers. One of the participants indicated she left her job because of stress and decided to pursue a career in "making things" (p. 512). The last theme was described as coherence, which focused on the influence of religion and spiritual beliefs on career decisions. The author noted that this theme was difficult to decipher due to the variability in the sample regarding religious and spiritual beliefs. However, a common theme reported by the participants was that God wanted them to

pursue a specific career. The participants also stated that they had a desire to serve God, and prayer was a source of strength and guidance. The participants believed developing and becoming a self, serving others, unity with others, and fulfilling one's needs were important in choosing a career. If the occupation does not reflect the above purposes, then participants were likely to change careers.

There are limitations to the study. As with the majority of studies in this area, the authors did not discuss the participants' process of incorporating religion and spirituality into the career decision-making process. In addition, due to the wide variability in the participants' spiritual and religious beliefs, it was difficult to determine how the above variables influenced the participants' career decisions.

Constantine et al. (2006) conducted a qualitative study on the influence of religion and spirituality on career development. The sample consisted of 12 African American undergraduate students. Eight of the participants were female, while 4 were male. Four of the participants were Catholic, 3 were nondenominational Christian, 3 were Baptist, 1 was Methodist, and 1 was Seventh-day Adventist.

The participants completed a demographic form and engaged in a semistructured interview with one of the authors. The interview protocol contained questions regarding the participants' religious and spiritual beliefs as well as their influence throughout the career decision-making process.

The authors reported the results for each of the questions in the interview protocol. The first question pertained to identification as religious or spiritual. Most of the participants identified as spiritual rather than religious. One of the participants referred to a belief in God, but did not adhere to the principles of a particular organized

religion. Some participants identified themselves as religious while others identified as both religious and spiritual. The second question pertained to parental influence on spiritual and religious beliefs. Most of the participants reported that their parents required them to attend church services. A few participants stated that their parents did not influence their religious or spiritual beliefs.

The third question pertained to the role of religion and spirituality in the career decision-making process. Most of the participants believed God had a plan for their lives that included career choice. The participants also indicated a desire to serve others through their vocation or career, although some of the participants indicated that religion and spirituality would not influence their choice of an occupation. The fourth question pertained to using religion and spirituality to cope with academic and career-related obstacles. Most of the participants indicated that they engaged in prayer, reading the Bible, and attending church services as a way of coping with difficult situations. The last question pertained to the variables that would contribute to future occupational success. Most of the participants indicated that using their talents, earning money, and being happy characterized future occupational success. The results of the study indicated that religion and spirituality had significant roles in the career decision-making process for these participants.

There were limitations to the study. The participants in the study were African Americans and undergraduate college students, which limits the generalizability of the results to a broader population. In addition, the authors did not explore the process of determining a vocation, which warrants further study.

### *Volunteerism and Religion*

Only one existing study addressed volunteerism as a form of work to which one may be called. Mattis et al. (2000) conducted a study to examine the influence of religion, communalism, and social capital on volunteerism in a sample of 171 African American men, ranging in age from 17 to 79. Fifty-eight percent of the participants had finished some college, 13% had a college degree, and 16% had a professional degree. The participants' yearly incomes ranged from less than \$10,000 to \$80,000.

The authors identified some aspects of religion, which were measured through a series of questions the authors created. The first was early socialization of religion, which pertained to parents having their children attend church and events, which may promote charity or helping those who are in need (Wilson & Janoski, 1995, as cited in Mattis et al., 2000). This variable was measured by four questions. The participants responded to the questions on a 5-point Likert scale, which ranged from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*) or 1 (*not at all important*) to 5 (*very important*) depending on the question. The reliability of these questions was .71. The second aspect was the frequency with which individuals attended church and church activities. This variable was measured through four questions, which required a yes or no response.

The authors defined communalism as being concerned for others in one's "social group and obligations to the group took precedence over personal desires" (p. 363). This variable was measured through the Communalism scale (Boykin, Jagers, Ellison, & Albury, 1997). The scale consisted of 31 items. The participants responded to the questions on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*completely false*) to 6 (*completely true*). The reliability of the scale for the study was .88. Finally, social capital referred to

levels of education and income as well as age. Information was gathered from a demographic form. All variables were measured through questions the authors created, and the questions required a yes or no response.

The authors conducted four multivariate logistic regression analyses. The first was to determine whether social capital and religion predicted volunteerism. The overall model was statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 28.82, p < .001$ ), which accounted for 25% of the variance. Age ( $z = 10.30, p < .01$ ) and education ( $z = 4.98, p < 0.5$ ) were statistically significant predictors of volunteerism. The second multivariate logistic regression examined the variables that predicted the number of volunteer hours. The overall model was statically significant ( $F = 5.53, p < .001$ ), which accounted for 26% of the variance. Communalism ( $B=.81, p < .01$ ) and church involvement ( $B=.58, p < .001$ ) were statistically significant predictors of the number of hours the participants engaged in volunteerism.

The third multivariate logistic regression examined whether social capital, communalism, and religion predicted involvement in political, social justice, or community associations. The overall model was statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 24.07, p < .01$ ), which accounted for 23% of the variance. Church involvement ( $z = 6.93, p < .01$ ) and 21-40 years of age ( $z = 4.60, p < .05$ ) were predictors of participation in community, social justice, and political associations. Seventeen to 20 years of age was not a significant predictor in the participation of community, social justice, and political associations. The fourth multivariate logistic regression examined the variables that predicted participation in political or social justice associations. The overall model was statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 35.78, p < .001$ ), which accounted for 33% of the variance.



Age ( $z = 6.68, p < .05$ ) was the only variable that was a statistically significant predictor of participation in social justice or political associations.

The authors concluded that participants who were actively involved in their church were prone to volunteerism. Increased church involvement led to greater hours of volunteer activities. However, church involvement did not influence participation in social and political organizations. Early socialization of religion and intrinsic religiosity did not contribute to participation and the number of hours of volunteer activities. The aforementioned religious dimensions also did not influence involvement in social and political groups. Participants who were active in their church and valued communalism volunteered the most hours. The increase in household income did not influence participation in volunteer, community, social, and political organizations. Participants with a degree of higher education were prone to becoming involved in volunteer activities compared to those with less than a college degree. Education did not influence participation in community, social, and political groups. Men between the ages of 22 and 40 were less likely than those younger and older to participate in volunteer activities.

There were several limitations to the study. The participants were all African American men. The authors reported the participants were not a true representation of the African American populations because the majority of the men in the study had incomes of more than \$80,000. This might have been the result of a snowball sample, in which participants recruited other participants for the study. Participants may have recruited individuals they interacted with, who were likely to have had a similar social economic status as those who suggested they participate in the study.

Self-reported measures were used in the study, which may lead to socially desirable responses. In addition, level of religiosity was measured from questions the author created. Issues of reliability and validity may arise when creating a mini-scale that was not psychometrically examined.

### *Calling and Career Decision*

Duffy and Sedlacek (2007) conducted a quantitative study that sought to examine the relationship between calling and career development. The study recruited 3,091 incoming freshmen from a Northeastern university. There were 1,578 men and 1,513 women in the study. In the sample, 56% were Caucasian, 15% were African American, 15% were Asian American, 8% were Latino/a, 5% were unknown, and 1% were Native American. The religious affiliations of the participants were as follows: 29% were Protestant, 26% were Roman Catholic, 15% were Jewish, 10% were agnostic, 6% were atheist, 3% were Islam/Muslim, 2% were Hindu, and 1% were Buddhist.

The authors identified two aspects of calling. The first aspect of a calling pertained to students who were aware of what career they had been called to pursue, which the authors referred to as the presence of a calling. The second aspect of a calling referred to finding a calling, which pertained to search for a calling. The presence and search for a calling were measured by two questions each.

Career development was measured by the Career Decision Profile (Jones, 1989). The self-reported scale contains 16 questions that measure occupation decision and comfort as well as the reasons for each of the variables. The reasons scale pertain to “self-clarity, indecisiveness, choice work salience and knowledge about occupations and

training” (Jones p. 483). Duffy & Sedlack (2007) made adjustments to this scale. The authors shifted the original questions for the knowledge and training subscale to self-clarity. This was due to the belief that the questions reflected the self-clarity subscale more so than the knowledge and training subscale. As a result, the knowledge and training subscale changed to the “lack of educational information” (p. 595). The reliability for the scale ranged from .62 to .85 for this study.

The data were initially analyzed through a correlation. The results indicated that there was a positive correlation between the presence of a calling, career decision, comfort, choice-work salience, and self-clarity. On the other hand, there was a negative correlation between search for a calling and the aforementioned variables. However, there was a positive correlation between the search for a calling, career indecision, and lack of resources. The second analysis involved multiple regressions. The first multiple regression measured “the ability of the presence of and search for calling to predict career decidedness” (p. 598). The model accounted for 8% of the variance. The second multiple regression measured the “presence of and search for calling to predict choice comfort” (p. 598). The model accounted for 5% of the variance while “controlling for the *Career Decision Profile* reason variables” (p. 596). The authors did not report the results of the overall model (R) or the beta coefficients.

The results of the study indicate that the presence of and search for a calling has a relationship with career development. The search for a calling may lead to career indecision because individuals are in the process of exploring and determining the career that reflects their skills. The presence of a calling may lead to a sense of career decision and being comfortable with the decision. However, it is unknown how the presence of a

calling contributes to career decisiveness and feeling comfortable with the decision. This dissertation seeks to address the issue by exploring how individuals determine their calling as well as its influence on career decision.

There are several limitations to the study. First, each of the instruments used to measure the construct of calling contained two questions. There is an issue of validity and reliability when measuring a construct with two questions. Second, the majority of the participants were Caucasians, and all of the students in the study were freshmen. Therefore, the results of the study may not generalize to the population. Third, the results indicated there was a positive correlation among the search for a calling, career indecision, and insufficient resources. However, it is possible that some of the students had not begun the process of thinking about choosing a career, which must also be considered. Fourth, the study did not explore whether participants who adhere to the principles of a specific religion or those who do not ascribe to an organized religion influence the presence or search for a calling. Level of religiosity may influence the search for or presence of a calling. For example, Davidson and Caddell (1994) reported that individuals who had high levels of intrinsic religiosity were prone to incorporating their religion into the career decision-making process. Hence, they may experience a calling to a career. However, Duffy and Sedlacek (2007) stated that people who were not religious may experience a calling or a sense of a life purpose. This was not fully explored in the study in terms of influence on the presence or search for a calling.

### *Calling and Vocation*

Dik and Duffy (in press) wrote a conceptual paper that provided a definition of vocation and calling. The authors defined vocation as “an approach to a particular life role that is oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented values and goals as a primary sources of motivation” (Dik & Duffy, p. 8). Vocation is generally defined as coming from a religion and not spirituality. A calling is defined as:

a transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond the self to approach a particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation. (p. 6)

Although vocation and calling both pertain to purpose and meaning in life, there is a difference between the terms. In a calling, the life role is influenced by an “external source” (p. 8). The source can derive from God or another source as defined by individuals (Dik & Duffy, in press). In this study, the source of a calling will pertain to deriving from God because the study seeks to understand the role of religion in the career decision-making process.

### *Summary*

This chapter discussed the Catholic perspective of vocation as well as reviewed the literature on religion, spirituality, and career decision. The general concept of vocation entails the person following God's will. In Catholicism, all people are called to serve God. The call to a vocation is unique for individuals because it is based on the gifts and abilities that God has given them. Work is one of the ways that individuals can use their gifts and abilities to serve God and His people. As individuals develop, their vocation may become clear as well as their capacity to answer their calling (U.S. Catholic Conference, 1994).

In Catholic teaching, a relationship with God is important to determine a vocation (U.S. Catholic Conference, 1994). To determine a vocation, individuals may engage in introspection. Introspection encourages people to reflect on their gifts and abilities that form identity (Neafsey, n.d.). Vocation is a reflection of the gifts and abilities that God has given them (U.S. Catholic Conference, 1994). The process of having a relationship with God to determine a vocation may be similar to traditional career counseling in that individuals may seek the assistance of a vocational psychologist to choose a career that reflects their gifts and abilities. This reflects the trait-factor theory of Holland (1997) and Dawis and Lofquist (1985) in which people choose careers that reflect their personalities (talents and abilities).

This chapter reviewed trait-factor theory as it related to traditional career counseling. The theory discusses the importance of choosing a career in which the working environment reflects the values, talents, and personality of the individual. Trait-factor theory recognizes the importance of values in the career decision-making process.

Religion may be one of the ways individuals form their values. Therefore, it is important for vocational counselors to explore the religious beliefs of individuals as well as understand how clients' religious values are used in making a career decision.

In addition, the studies reviewed reports that religion and spirituality influenced career decision as well as participation in volunteerism, which was considered a form of work. There were limitations to the studies. The studies reviewed mostly had Protestant participants. The results of these studies may not be generalized to other religious groups. A second limitation was that none of the studies fully explored the religious and spiritual beliefs of the participants, which may be important in understanding the influence of religion and spirituality on career choice.

The present study seeks to address the limitations of the studies reviewed. First, I explored the religious beliefs of the participants in order to gain further understanding of the process of incorporating religion into the career decision-making process as well as the unique ways in which individuals are called to their vocation. Furthermore, I recruited Roman Catholics, because the majority of existing studies included only Protestant participants.

## CHAPTER III

### Methodology

The purpose of this study is to aid vocational psychologists in understanding how people experience a call to a career, as well as the process of experiencing a call to a career. Although some studies discuss the influence of religion/spirituality on the career decision-making process, almost none of the research discussed in the literature review has explored the process of career decision-making from a religious perspective. Therefore, as described below, this study will use a qualitative technique—specifically, phenomenology, a methodology that focuses on describing and explaining the human experience. This section will address the rationale for using phenomenology, sample selection, data collection, data analysis, validity, and ethical issues. Further, as an essential component of qualitative research, the chapter begins with a discussion of the worldview of the primary researcher.

#### *Primary Researcher's Worldview*

I am a 30-year-old Black Cuban female and a sixth-year doctoral student in the counseling psychology program at a Catholic university. I am a practicing Catholic, and my faith is a very important aspect of my life. For example, approximately 6 years ago, I experienced a call to pursue a career in psychology while I was enrolled in an occupational therapy program. During the occupational therapy program, I began to have doubts about pursuing this career. Although I had an interest in working with those who had a disability, I was uncertain if occupational therapy was the right fit for me. I slowly



lost my passion and joy for occupational therapy when I had my psychology rotation. The rotation peaked my interest in psychology. The attraction to psychology grew stronger in the coming months when I had my physical disability rotation. The reason was that I began to recognize the psychological impact of a disability. I began to question if I should pursue a career in psychology. However, I struggled with the decision to switch careers because of uncertainty about making the right decision.

I discussed the situation with my priest. He encouraged me to engage in introspection and prayer to determine God's call. During the process of introspection, I reflected on my values and talents. I not only desired a career that reflected my talents, but I also had a deep passion to contribute positively to society. I also wanted a career that would make me happy, which was very important to me. After 6 months of prayer and introspection, I decided to pursue a career in psychology because I couldn't imagine being happy in a career other than psychology. Once I made the decision, I felt a sense of peace. The priest reported that the sense of peace communicated that I was answering God's call. I believe that psychology matches my values, interests, and skills as well as provides me with a sense of joy and satisfaction due to serving others, which is the core essence of my religion. Due to my personal experience of having a call to a career, I accepted a graduate assistant position at the Center of Vocation and Servant Leadership at the university I attended in 2003. The Center for Vocation and Servant Leadership was established through a grant from the Lily Endowment, which created programs that assist students in incorporating their religion into the career decision-making process.

Due to my personal experience of being called to a career, I decided to conduct a study on career calling. I believe it is important for vocational psychologists to become aware of and understand the process of career calling as well as assess the role of religion and spirituality in the career decision-making process. I recognize that my personal experience led to bias in the study. The bias might affect or influence my ability to interpret the results of the data. Therefore, a member of my dissertation committee who is familiar with phenomenology has reviewed the data analysis process in order to ensure the accuracy of the interpretation and that it reflects the participants' experience. This will be discussed in further detail in the validity section of this chapter.

### *Rationale for Using Phenomenology*

Phenomenological methodology lends itself to this study because phenomenology focuses on how people experience a call to a career. Because the methodology is detailed in nature, phenomenology provides information on the process and resources the participants used in being called to a career, as well as the participants' thoughts, feelings, and the meaning associated with the experience. This methodology aided me in understanding the true essence of the participants' experience with being called to a career. In addition, qualitative methodology was useful when there was a lack of information on a specific topic, as was the case with research on how people experience a call to a career. Therefore, qualitative methodology allowed information to unfold and for me to gain understanding of this topic, which has been only sparsely studied. In addition, I chose qualitative methodology because there was a lack of available scales that measure vocation and calling that had adequate reliability and validity (Dik & Duffy, in press).

Phenomenology was developed by Edward Husserl, a philosopher (Creswell, 1998) and focuses on seeking the meaning of experiences (Lavery, 2003; Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological movement in psychology in the United States was guided by Amedeo Giorgi. Giorgi had a Ph.D. in experimental psychology and later enrolled in an existential-phenomenology program at Duquesne University. He developed methods to conduct phenomenological research, which he taught at Duquesne. Giorgi also wrote articles addressing the issue of validity in phenomenology, and in 1970 he created the *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology* (Wertz, 2005).

The main tenet of phenomenology is finding the essential meaning of experiences by reflecting on them. In order to reflect on experiences, these experiences must enter the consciousness. I guided this process through a semistructured interview (Moustakas, 1994). Reflection aided the participants in determining the meaning of their experiences.

Researchers using phenomenological methods cannot be completely absent of biases. Some level of bias will be present throughout the process. Also, as mentioned above, environmental factors might distract or influence participants' ability to consciously reflect on experiences as well as to determine the meaning of their personal experience with a particular phenomenon. Bracketing, or epoche, helps researchers become aware of the influences and personal biases that prevent researchers from seeing the true essence of a particular experience (Lavery, 2003). Bracketing requires researchers to write their biases as they arise in the margins of the transcripts. Engaging in bracketing does not ensure that researchers will be free of their biases. It assists researchers in becoming aware of their biases and its influences on the research (Orbe, 2000).

Throughout the study, I engaged in bracketing by maintaining a journal of my biases. One of the frequent biases that arose from bracketing was the similarities between the participants' and my experience of a calling. For example, I knew my calling early on and decided not to initially pursue it because I was concerned about whether I could afford the years of training to become a psychologist. In addition, during the time I did not follow my calling was when I was not engaged in my faith. Second, my family and acquaintances recommended for years that I become a psychologist because they recognized that my talents would be a good fit in psychology. This was similar to the experiences reported by some of the participants in the study.

The procedures to address my bias were not limited to bracketing. I wrote my personal story as a way to reflect on my own experiences, and become aware of how my personal experiences might influence the study. In addition, a member of my dissertation committee assisted me in extracting and interpreting the themes. This method ensured that the process of data analysis was accurate. I also engaged in a peer debriefing with a psychology doctoral student at a Northeastern university. During the peer debriefing, I discussed the themes and the essence of experiencing a calling based on the data. These procedures were helpful in decreasing the influence of my biases in the study. Notwithstanding the techniques, qualitative research is always affected by the researcher's own characteristics and experiences.

Phenomenology allows information to unfold as the data are collected. Phenomenology does not specify what it intends to ascertain before the study is conducted. The interview protocol for this study (Appendix A) contains general questions

to elicit the true essence of the participants' experiences of being called to a career. Furthermore, phenomenology does not contain hypotheses because these would constitute a "preconceived notion" (Orbe, 2000, p. 607), which might affect the unfolding and ingenuousness of the process. Instead, phenomenology contains a detailed account of participants' experience.

In phenomenology, the participants have an active role throughout the study. Due to the active role of the participants, they are referred to as coresearchers (Moustakas, 1994). However, I used the term participants throughout the study because it was consistent with APA style guidelines (APA, 2001). The participants' role in the study was not limited to the interview. Their role also included the participants providing me with feedback regarding the accuracy of the transcripts and themes or essence extracted from their experiences.

### *Sample Selection*

Purposeful sampling, rather than using a random process, involves recruiting participants who have experienced the phenomenon under investigation (Polkinghorne, 2005). This allowed me to determine the common themes or experiences among the participants. Seven participants self-identified as experiencing a call to a career. Participants were recruited until no new information regarding the experience of the phenomenon was revealed, which is referred to as saturation (Creswell, 1998).

The participants were recruited from a Roman Catholic church in the Northeast. I received permission from the parish priest to make a brief announcement at mass describing and discussing the significance of the study. After mass, I provided the

parishioners with a flyer that contained a summary of the announcement and my contact information. The announcement and the flyer sought to recruit people who had experienced a call to a career to participate in the study.

Recruiting only Roman Catholics for the study limited the generalizability of the data. However, much of the research that had been conducted on religion and spirituality and its influence on career decisions was with Protestant participants. There might be an underlying assumption that Roman Catholic calling is limited to religious life. This might impact the decision for researchers to not recruit Catholics for studies on career calling. Therefore, Catholics were recruited for the study to fully explore how they experience a call to a career.

### *Ethical Issues*

The 7 participants were provided with an informed consent form before the start of the interview. The informed consent form indicated that the participants could withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty. In addition, the form discussed procedures for data collection, confidentiality, anonymity, anticipated risks, and audiotaping, which will be further discussed in subsequent sections. It was essential for the participants to be aware of the aforementioned information before they participated in the study (Moustakas, 1994).

### *Data Collection*

Data were collected from a lengthy interview (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994).

The interviews varied depending whether I had gathered enough information to determine the meaning of the participants' experience of being called to a career. The interviews on average were an hour long, which was consistent with Polkinghorne's (2005) recommendation. However, some interviews were approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes. Elizabeth was the only participant with whom I had a follow-up interview to clarify her responses and to receive more information to assist me in understanding her experience of being called to her volunteer work.

The interview was considered semistructured because it consisted of open-ended questions and a dialogue. There were also follow-up questions to clarify participants' responses. The interview protocol (Appendix A) was developed from a review of the literature (Dik & Duffy, in press; Sellers et al., 2005). The questions provided me with an opportunity to gather information about the participants' experiences with being called to a career. Although I developed an interview protocol, the interview process in a phenomenological study reflects a conversation. This encourages the participants to freely discuss their experience with the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). As a result, I determined the true essence of the participants' experiences of being called to a career.

Furthermore, establishing rapport with the participants is essential in qualitative interviews. It was important to create trust and a safe environment for the participants to discuss their experience with the phenomenon. Skills used in therapy such as

attentiveness, listening, and reflection may be transferred to the research interview when establishing a relationship (Polkinghorne, 2005).

However, there are distinctions between therapeutic intake and the research interview. The purpose of the therapeutic intake is to gather information in order to use appropriate therapeutic interventions to address clients' issues. On the other hand, the purpose of the research interview is to gather information to gain understanding and to determine the meaning of the participants' experience of being called to a career. These distinctions needed to be clearly stated to the participants (Polkinghorne, 2005). The interview protocol did not elicit any distress from the participants.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face. All of the interviews were audiotaped. A digital tape recorder was used during the interview. The interview was downloaded to a CD. The CD was labeled with a pseudo-name and a number I assigned to protect the anonymity of the participants. The date the interview occurred was also labeled on the CD. Once the data had been collected, they were transcribed by two research assistants. The research assistants were graduate students at a Northeastern university. I reviewed the transcripts for accuracy because it could affect the analysis or interpretation of the data (Creswell, 1998). The research assistants saved the transcripts on the same CD. In addition, I maintained field notes regarding observations of the participants and setting. According to Lavery (2003), silences and body language are as important as the participants' statements.

Furthermore, I maintained a journal that contained information on preconceived notions that could influence my interpretation of the results, following the process of bracketing as described above. The field notes were filed in a folder. The label on the



field notes corresponded with the pseudo-name and date on the tapes and transcripts for each participant. The journal was a notebook that was kept in a separate folder from the field notes.

### *Data Analysis*

The analysis followed the procedure described by Moustakas (1994). These include epoche, horizontalization, imaginative free variation, structural description, and composite textual description.

#### *Epoche*

The first step was to engage in epoche, or bracketing. I wrote my biases as they arose in a journal, as discussed earlier in the chapter. The process of bracketing assisted me in becoming aware of personal biases and their influence on the interpretation of the analysis (Laverty, 2003).

#### *Horizontalization*

The second step involved choosing statements from the transcripts that describe the participants' experience of the phenomenon. This helped me understand the participants' experience and feelings associated with being called to a career.

### *Invariant Horizons*

The third step was invariant horizons. This involved reducing the number of statements by choosing those that were not repetitive. The statements provided information and meaning about the participants' experience.

### *Imaginative Free Variation*

The fourth step was imaginative free variation. The goal of this step was to determine the meaning or essence of the participants' experience. I considered the factors that influenced the call to a career as well as the participants' thoughts and feelings about the experience. This intermediary step created the foundation for the structural description that will be discussed below.

### *Structural Description*

The fifth step was grouping the invariant horizons into structural descriptions. The structural descriptions were core themes that discussed the resources, thoughts, and feelings associated with being called to a career for each of the participants. The structural descriptions contained verbatim excerpts from the interview.

### *Composite Textual Description*

The final step required me to review the structural descriptions for each of the participants and develop a composite textual description that discussed the overall essence or meaning of being called to a career (Moustakas, 1994).

### *Validity*

The validity of phenomenological studies is determined by how truthful the results are. Truthfulness of the data was determined by reviewing the methods and the text. For example, I reviewed the transcripts for accuracy as a way to determine if they reflected what the participants had stated during the interview. I also sent the transcripts to the participants for their review. The structural description or interpretation reflected the participants' experience. In addition, I maintained a journal of my biases that pertained to bracketing, as noted above.

Qualitative research lends itself more to external validity than to internal validity, which is a focus in quantitative methodology. The lack of internal validity has been one of the limitations in conducting qualitative research. However, Giorgi (2002) indicated that the idea of validity in quantitative research is being transferred to qualitative research. This should be reconsidered. Since quantitative research relies heavily on tests, it is important that it measures what it intends to study. In test construction, there are statistical analyses to determine if the questions reflect the construct being studied. The tests provide fractional information about the construct because the participants are responding typically, but not always, on a Likert scale their opinions or beliefs about the construct. According to Giorgi, this "is not the same as full behavioral, experiential living through of a situation where such characteristics are existentially demonstrated" (p. 4), which lends itself to qualitative research. Thus, the concept of validity in quantitative research might not effectively transfer to qualitative research because the function of these two methodologies is different. This doesn't imply that validity is not important in qualitative research, but validity is different for these two methodologies.

In addition, my personal experience of being called to a career might have influenced my interpretation of the results. This may compromise the external validity of the results. As a result, a member of my dissertation committee guided me in extracting and interpreting the themes. As noted previously, it is essential that the themes reflect the participants' experience of being called to a career. Therefore, I mailed a copy of the transcripts to the participants to verify whether the transcripts reflected the participants' perception of the experience (Groenewald, 2004). The above process validated the data from the study.

### *Summary*

The design for this study was phenomenology. Phenomenology is a qualitative methodology that focuses on seeking meaning and understanding of experiences, such as being called to a career. Meaning was established when the participants consciously reflected on their experiences. The interview protocol contained general questions that guided the dialogue between the primary researcher and the participants. The questions elicited the conscious reflection of experience as well as the factors that influenced the experience. Throughout the phenomenological study, I engaged in bracketing (epoche), which was a process in which I maintained a journal of my biases. Bracketing assisted me in becoming aware of how my biases might influence the study. In addition to bracketing, I wrote my personal story as a way to reflect on my experiences, and become aware of how my personal experiences might influence the study.

Data were collected through interviews. The interview was semistructured because it consisted of open-ended questions and a dialogue that was useful in gathering information about the participants' experience in being called to a career. Once the interview was completed, it was transcribed by two research assistants. I read the transcripts and extracted statements that described the call to a career that pertained to horizontalization. The number of statements were reduced by removing those that were repetitive that pertained to invariant horizons. I engaged in imaginative free variation that considered the factors that led to a call to a career. This led to structural descriptions or themes that described the meaning of the experience of career calling for each of the participants. I reviewed the structural descriptions for each of the participants and developed a composite textual description that discussed the overall essence or meaning of being called to a career (Moustakas, 1994). Validation of the data occurred through sending the participants the transcripts to verify whether they reflected the participants' experience of being called. In addition, a member of my dissertation committee reviewed the themes to ensure the accuracy of the extraction and interpretation. I also had a peer debriefing with a psychology doctoral student in which I discussed the themes and the essence of the participants' experience of being called to a career based on the data.

This study lent itself to qualitative methodology because it allows a more complex description of the process under study, in this case, the process of being called to a career. Qualitative studies allow new information to emerge that aids psychologists in gaining knowledge and perspective about a phenomenon.

## CHAPTER IV

### Results

The results presented in this chapter were based on phenomenological methodology, in which semistructured interviews were conducted to address the research question on the influence of religion on career decisions. The procedures used to collect and analyze the data were discussed in chapter 3. This chapter contains two sections. The first section provides a description of the participants. The second part of the chapter discusses the themes that emerged based on the semistructured interview.

#### *Description of the Participants*

Seven participants were interviewed for the study in February 2008. All of the participants were recruited from one Roman Catholic church in the Northeast. I made an announcement at church and provided parishioners with a flyer describing the study and my contact information. Individuals who self-identified as experiencing a call to a career participated. It should be noted that two churches initially agreed to allow me to recruit participants, but one later withdrew because the contact became ill.

All 7 participants were Caucasian. Four were female, and three were male. The age of the participants ranged from 43 to 61. The marital statuses of the participants were the following: 1 was divorced, 1 was single, and 5 were married. Specific safeguards were used to maintain the anonymity of the participants. For example, pseudonyms are used to describe the participants throughout this chapter. Race, age, and marital status are discussed above for the entire group and are not included in the individual descriptions of

the participants. This might minimize the opportunity for readers to identify the participants based on the aforementioned demographics.

### *Judith*

Judith identified her calling as being a teacher for the past 17 years. She reported experiencing her call to become a teacher between the ages of 15 and 17. In addition, she volunteers in the church's youth group, 4–5 hours a month. She attends mass weekly.

### *Charity*

Charity identified her calling as being a teacher for the past 37 years. She experienced her call to teach at 7 years old. Furthermore, her volunteer activities include the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA), lector, Pastoral Council, and senior outreach. Charity dedicates 7 hours a month to her volunteer activities. She attends mass weekly and on holy days.

### *Paul*

Paul identified his calling as being a public defender, and he has been employed in this occupation for the past 23 years and 11 months. He also indicated that he was called to be an adjunct professor at a Northeastern university. Paul noted he experienced his call to his career as an adolescent. In addition, Paul volunteers as a coach for softball and field hockey. He also volunteers as a lector, Eucharistic minister, and usher for the church. He dedicates 30 hours a month to these activities. He also attends weekly mass.

*Elizabeth*

Elizabeth has been employed as a pharmaceutical liaison for more than 30 years. However, she identified her calling as volunteer work, such as the soup kitchen, the children's liturgy, and youth leader. Elizabeth dedicates 10 hours a month to her volunteer activities. She experienced her calling at the age of 35. In addition, she reports attending mass weekly and on holy days.

*Esther*

Esther reported she was called to become a nurse at age 20. Esther has been a registered nurse for 24 years. In addition, she volunteers as a Eucharistic minister at the church approximately 5 hours a month. Esther attends mass weekly and on holidays and holy days.

*Peter*

Peter identified his calling as being a teacher for the past 28 years. Currently, he is employed as a professor at a Northeastern university. He experienced his call to his vocation between the ages of 17 and 18. In addition, he volunteers as an assistant scoutmaster and lector at the church. A lector is one who reads the Bible passages during mass. He reported participating in these activities for 10–15 hours a month. Peter stated he attends mass weekly.



*Charles*

Charles identified his calling as being a mental health case manager for the past 11 years. Charles noted that he experienced his calling to become a case manager when he was 39 years old. In addition, he volunteers 5 hours a week in a 12-step program. Charles attends mass weekly and on holy days of obligation. He is active in his church as evidenced by being a sacristan, which entails preparing the church for mass, and a Eucharistic minister, which refers to distributing the bread or wine during communion.

*Phenomenological Themes*

The analysis of the data was based on interviews and used the steps described in chapter 3. The discussion below is divided into the following sections: Pulled by God, the Process, and the Impact of Following the Call.

As described in the sections below, the data revealed several facets about calling and career. First, participants described a call as a pull from God to serve a higher purpose. Some of the participants knew their calling, but because of doubts that coincided with questioning their faith, the participants did not follow their calling initially. Second, when the participants followed their calling, some wondered about the area within their calling they should pursue. Although these participants were following their calling, determining which specialization to pursue was similar to the struggle of initially finding a calling.

The analysis of the data suggested that the participants went through a long process characterized by the following themes: being pulled by God toward their calling, questioning their faith, the journey back to the church, struggles with the calling, following the calling, and the impact of the calling on the participants' lives. The final theme that emerged was the impact of the calling, both on the participants and on others in their lives.

### *Pulled by God*

This theme focused on the meaning of calling as defined by the participants. The definition of the calling had two components. The first aspect was based on their religious beliefs. The second part of the definition of the calling was defined more by the personal meaning the participants had and their emotional connection with their vocation.

When asked to define "calling," the participants defined calling as receiving direction or guidance from God, and that a calling refers to work that serves others. For example, Judith stated:

Calling, I would define it as being guided in a specific area, being pulled, being led towards a specific area. I wouldn't say it's necessarily an area that you're going to be good at, but an area where you're going to have the most impact in the world. It may be something where you're growing into that calling. That you're pulled in a direction where this is where you're going to serve the most people or this is where you're going to have the most impact in people's lives.

Furthermore, the participants described a calling as a reflection of God's plan for people. A calling is a reflection of people's personality, talents, and gifts. God presents people with suggestions and different options. People choose a career based on what is appropriate for them. Paul stated:

I would define the term calling as sort of the suggestion that God has presented to you. I don't think God give[s] you a single choice, a single calling, but gives you a number of different options. And you choose the one that you believe that is the most appropriate for you, but God hasn't said that this is the one and only thing you can do. I think God does give you options.

Moreover, the participants described a calling as a persistent thought and feeling that does not dissipate until an individual answers it. Answering the calling requires taking the responsibility that accompanies the calling such as frustrations, hurt, and sacrifice. To summarize, a calling pertains to experiencing a pull or being guided by God to pursue a specific career that reflects an individual's talents. It is important to reemphasize that a calling pertains to using one's gifts to serve others. If an individual is not using his or her talents to assist others, then it is not a calling. Elizabeth stated:

So, it's more than why you're here on Earth. It's what you're going to do with that talent. Put it very baseline, people have a talent for singing. So they go and sing, and they make people happy. But when you sing in a choir or you work with children to teach them how to sing or you use your talent to benefit people and not just make people feel good. To use that talent to do some good with that talent is a calling. Just having the talent, but not knowing what to do with it is not the calling. It's the use of your talent.

### *Questioning Their Faith*

Most of the participants questioned their faith as part of the process of their calling. They doubted their faith, their Church, and their God and felt a mixture of anger, resentment, and confusion. Questioning their faith was significant period in their lives because they were raised in the Catholic faith. Catholicism was a very important part of their personal and their families' lives. Therefore, questioning their faith was a painful and difficult process for most of the participants.

Five out of the 7 participants (1 man and 4 women) indicated that they left the Church at some point due to questioning their faith. One of the participants clearly identified a specific event that triggered this process, while 4 of the participants began questioning their faith in a more gradual way. Two of the participants (Elizabeth and Charity) described feeling angry at God and at the Church's teachings, and this frustration was apparent as they discussed the events that led them to question their faith. Elizabeth reported she was angry that her parents had difficulty practicing their faith because her father had previously been married. She did not understand why the Church did not allow her parents to participate in the sacraments. As a result, she reported that she left the Church during the end of high school for approximately 4 to 6 years. She described this as follows:

We had an incident in my family. My parents were married older. My father was previously divorced. They were not allowed to be Catholic; they weren't excommunicated, but they were not allowed to take part in any sacraments. I didn't necessary believe in that. My parents loved each other very much, and I

didn't see . . . I couldn't understand why they weren't allowed to practice Catholicism, which was very important to them.

Charity stated that the experience of questioning her faith and leaving the Church began as a gradual process. This occurred after the death of her father when she was an adolescent. She expressed anger at God, after which she refused to pray for 3 years. Charity indicated she went to church because she was raised with the belief that not attending mass would cause her to go to hell. During high school, she met a priest who encouraged her to express her anger, which allowed her to make amends with the situation. However, she later questioned other aspects of the Catholic Church. For example, she expressed frustration with the Church's refusal to allow women to be ordained priests. Finally, Charity also became angry with her parish priest, who refused to bless her premature grandson at the hospital because Charity's daughter did not want her son to be baptized Catholic. An Episcopalian bishop who knew Charity's daughter's mother-in-law performed the blessing. As a result of the incident, Charity left the Church. She stated:

I remember calling this priest up and asking him to come down to at least bless my grandson. The priest said, "Well, am I going to baptize him as a Catholic?" I said, "No," and he said, "Well then, I'm not going to come down and bless him." So, that just shut me right off, and yet, the bishop of his grandmother's church and his grandmother is an Episcopalian. The bishop came and blessed this baby, didn't baptize him. That just left a sour taste in my mouth, and as a result, I was like, I don't need this, and I don't need this church.

Charles discussed various situations that led him to question his faith. For example, he believed there was a disconnect between the Church's teachings on "love thy neighbor" and the use of corporal punishment by Catholic schoolteachers. He stated:

I guess one of the things that I kind of got turned off by was people saying "love thy neighbor as thy self," and here was somebody hopefully representing a religion being very violent. So that came across like, what's going on here?

In addition, he reported not having a connection with the Church because it was "his parents' parish" and not his. He also believed if his siblings did not attend mass then there was no reason for him to go.

Esther reported questioning her faith in college, where she was exposed to various cultures and religions. She commented:

Throughout my childhood and all the way through early adolescence, you know, went to church, prayed at home with my family. Part of my childhood I had Catholic education, but not all. And then I went to college, it was kind of like, you know, the first time in my life that it was really like away from that environment, you know. Living in a dorm room exposed to other people, other faiths, other cultures, other everything. So you know you go through this questioning period, which I think is part of adolescence. You know, what do I believe, how do I feel you know, what's right, what's wrong, you know, and you have all those challenges in college, or at least I did.

It is important to note that 2 of the participants (Peter and Paul) did not leave the Church. Although Peter did not leave the Church, as an adolescent he reported difficulties understanding his faith. Peter learned about the teachings of the Catholic faith and about

the life of Jesus Christ as well as receiving the sacraments such as confirmation. However, he did not understand who Jesus was and the meaning of the Catholic faith as well as how to incorporate the faith into his life. This was important because Peter struggled with his faith similarly to Judith, Charity, Elizabeth, Charles, and Esther, but did not leave the Church. Not everyone who questions his or her faith leaves the Church. Instead, Peter connected with people who were intrinsically religious. Peter participated in a prayer meeting where he began to study the Bible and an individual explained the meaning of specific books in the Bible. The prayer group assisted Peter in understanding Jesus Christ and developing a relationship with Jesus because Peter “accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior.” Unlike the other participants, Paul had continuously attended mass since he was a child. He never experienced doubts about his faith. Paul commented:

It’s been constant. It’s never been that I’ve had doubts, so it’s been constant in like that there’s an expectation that there’s a guiding and this is how you do things. So I don’t think there’s been a mark or a change. There’s never come a time that I considered leaving the Church or embracing a foreign religion or life.

### *Journey Back to the Church*

The 5 participants who left the Church all returned at some point. The path to return to the Church was a journey that was a gradual process for these participants. It did not occur immediately. For some of the participants, their return to the Church was due to a personal crisis while others made amends with some of the Church’s teachings they had disagreed with.

Two of the participants described a journey in returning to the Church that was marked by events such as recovering from alcoholism and the death of family members. In addition, the 5 participants indicated that the influence of others such as a priest, friend, spouse, and godmother encouraged them to return to the Church. For example, Charity indicated that a priest was integral in aiding her to return to the Church. She reported the priest at the parish affiliated with the school where she taught encouraged her to attend mass when she was ready. When she finally did attend mass, this priest approached Charity and gave her a hug. He listened to her concerns about joining a church and encouraged her to pray. Eventually, she decided to complete the registration form to become a member of the church, but she still waited for a sign that this was the right thing to do. She spoke to God and indicated if Monsignor walked by her pew, she would give him her church registration. Charity said the following prayer:

God, I have this registration form in my hand. I am not going to get up and give this to the pastor. If I am meant to be part of this parish, let him come down my aisle, and then I will give it to him.

Monsignor walked by her, and she gave him her church registration. Charity described this event as follows:

He just came right by. I was like, oh gosh. This is for real. This is like a commitment. It's not just a commitment to [name of church], but a commitment to my faith. I took it out and gave it to him, and he said, "Okay, thank you," not even knowing who I was other than I worked at the school. That was the end of that. I have been involved since.



She believed the priest who encouraged and listened to her was the reason she returned to church. Charity perceived the situation with the priest in assisting her to return to the Church as God directing her. She believed that God spoke to her through the priest. In addition, God answered her prayer about whether to join the church when Monsignor took her registration form while she conversed with God at church.

Esther reported an experience similar to what Charity stated regarding the influence of others. Esther mentioned that one of her friends was trying to convince her that God has a purpose for everyone's life and encouraged her to seek it. One day, she received a ride home from a woman who lived in her area. The woman invited Esther to attend the Christian day of renewal, which was a retreat. The retreat had seminars and an opportunity to attend mass and pray. She discussed encountering a priest at that event whose facial expression was that of "joy and peace." She desired this in her life, and at the event, she recommitted herself to God and her Catholic faith.

Elizabeth also reported the influence of other people on her return. For her, it was her godmother, who spoke to and encouraged her to return to the Church, and her husband, who was a practicing Catholic. She attended mass with him. She believed both her husband and her godmother were important individuals who assisted her in returning to the Church.

Some of the participants reported that even though they'd left the Church, they couldn't give up the Catholic faith even though they were frustrated with some of the Church's positions. Some of the participants stated that there were specific traditions and principles of the Catholic faith that were important to them. Charity stated:

No matter how many times I groan about the Catholic Church, I wasn't ready yet to go somewhere else even though I was welcomed there. Being disgruntled or angry with a priest or being angry with the Church, can I really give up my beliefs, especially my belief in the transfiguration [*sic*]. That the priest through the Holy Spirit has the power to turn the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ and go to another church where it simply says it's bread and wine. I was like, can I do that? It was [the] ultimate. It was like God was saying, "If you're going to go, then you must leave everything. Even though the one thing that you hold most precious to you, that's the Eucharist. That's my son." I wasn't ready to do that.

Similar to Charity, Charles reported that his return to the Church was influenced by a feeling that he couldn't give up the Catholic faith. Alcoholism also had a role in Charles's decision to reengage in the Church. He stated:

Because I tell myself, like being very committed, like the Catholic traditions and things like that. Part of my story is there's a lot of alcoholism in my family. When I started going to recovery, I went back to the Church.

### *Struggles with the Calling*

As noted earlier, some of the participants knew their calling early in their lives, but because of doubts that coincided with questioning their faith, they did not follow their calling initially. However, they reported being continually pulled back into their calling by accepting jobs that were similar to their calling. Participants also reported experiencing persistent thoughts and feelings about their calling that dissipated when

finally they made the commitment to pursue it, and this generally coincided with their return to the Church. For example, Judith reported she experienced her calling when she was young, and she felt drawn to children. She enjoyed babysitting and knew she wanted to work with children. Judith believed she would have an impact on children's lives by becoming a teacher. She described enrolling in college and withdrawing from the school. Judith indicated she withdrew from school due to having doubts and believed she was unable to follow her calling. Judith stated:

I think there was a correlation between the times that I would struggle with my calling and my religion. There were times where I was just like, no, this is just the Catholic Church is not for me. It was almost a period of time where nothing seemed right. The Catholic Church wasn't right. You kind of just pulled away from everything. Then I think about my upbringing and being around people like my mother and my grandmother whose faith was very strong and seeing them and going back to the church on a regular basis and listening. Just taking the time to listen. "OK, God, I have no idea what I'm doing. Give me some direction and things would fall into place."

Second, when the participants followed their calling, some struggled to determine the area within their calling they should pursue. For example, Peter discussed that he worked as a teacher in middle school and high school. However, he did not receive positive feedback from his supervisor due to Peter's difficulty in disciplining his students. He became unhappy, and although this did not discourage him from following his calling to teach, he wondered which area in teaching he should pursue. Eventually, he decided to

become a college professor and believed this reflected his gifts and talents. Peter described this as follows:

I didn't last to tenure up in the junior high, and I was having discipline problems in my classes. They didn't hire me back a third year. They had me 2 years and said, we can't use you anymore. So, I started looking around again and got the job in the high school. I thought high school is my look, but I was still having trouble with discipline. Meanwhile, my wife keeps pushing me to get that doctorate. I had never stopped taking classes. I'm ready to do my dissertation so I start looking around so I put together a dissertation so I did a study so I put the stuff together. Submitted it, I defended in 1994, and after that, the doors opened up, and I was given a chance to teach in college, and my eyes were completely opened. This is spectacular. I love this.

Paul believed he had two callings, which he identified as being an adjunct professor and a lawyer. This reflected his definition of a calling in which he reported that God provided people with several gifts and talents. There was not just one thing an individual can pursue. During the interview, Paul reported he received his degree in law, but decided to return to public school teaching. After his teaching position was eliminated, he decided to become a practicing attorney as well as an adjunct professor. However, when he decided to practice law, he did not know which area to specialize in. Paul's experience was similar to what Judith reported in that he was aware of one of his callings, which was an attorney, but did not pursue it initially after completing his law degree. On the other hand, when Paul decided to become a practicing attorney, he was

uncertain about which area in law to pursue. This was similar to the experience Peter reported, which was uncertainty about which area within his calling to pursue.

Charity was the only participant who knew her calling early on and followed it. In addition, Charles was the only participant who did not know his calling early in his life. Rather, he described a long process of searching for his calling. While in high school, he thought about pursuing a career as a paralegal or attorney. Charles also reported he had various jobs such as delivering flowers and working in an alcohol rehabilitation facility. Charles's confusion about his calling coincided with his struggles with his faith.

Elizabeth was the only participant who left her calling of being a teacher because she was unable to financially support herself with the salary she was receiving. Therefore, she decided to leave the profession of teaching and became a pharmaceutical liaison. However, her volunteer work was representative of her calling. For example, she volunteers for the children's liturgy at her parish in which she discusses with the children the mass readings. She also volunteered to teach science at her children's afterschool programs when they were younger and at the church's summer school. She continues to volunteer to teach in the school and balances it with the soup kitchen and youth leader at her parish.

*Feelings associated with struggling with the calling.* The struggle with the calling produced one subtheme, which is the feelings associated with struggling with the calling. The subtheme involved the participants' emotions as they grappled with either finding or moving away from their calling. The participants described feeling unhappy, lonely, depressed, unfulfilled confused, embarrassed, emptied, and devastated. For example, Peter stated about his feelings of struggling to find an area within teaching to pursue:

I dealt better with the discipline problems so it wasn't as though everything was wonderful. I was pretty upset. This was my calling, and I was failing in it. That was a very difficult thing. It wasn't always just great wonderful feelings. I was devastated, I gotta tell ya. When I first started teaching at a Northeast school, got my degree from a Northeast university, taught for 2 years, and now I'm teaching where I want to be, American school systems, and I'm failing out. I was devastated, I can tell you.

### *Resources Used*

The participants used an array of resources to resolve the ambivalence described above. The participants reported that prayer, reading the Bible, speaking with a priest or mentor, support from Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), or support from a career counselor was a helpful resource in finding their calling, and several participants used more than one resource. In addition, some of the participants indicated that God communicated the calling through others. As they assisted in the participants' struggles with their faith, friends and spouses may provide people with suggestions on the career to pursue that reflects their gifts and talents. For example, Elizabeth described how one of the nuns in her parish recruited her to volunteer for the children's liturgy. She indicated that this nun had the ability to recognize people's gifts and suggest volunteer work that reflected their talent. Elizabeth emphasized the point that she did not seek the opportunity to volunteer. Sister approached the participant and suggested she volunteer for the children's liturgy because it reflected Elizabeth's gifts and talents. Elizabeth and some other participants

reported that they did not think about pursuing a specific calling until an individual made the suggestion. Elizabeth commented:

Well, with the children's liturgy especially, I didn't come up to Sister and ask her if I could do it. She came up to me; she approached me. There's not many people that can understand she really has that wonderful ability to find things in people.

In Peter's case, his wife suggested that he become a college professor, but he believed he was meant to teach high school. However, as mentioned earlier, after he experienced some difficulties in disciplining the students in middle and high schools, his wife encouraged him to pursue his doctorate in education. Once he completed his doctorate, he decided to make the transition to teach at a college. He credited his wife with assisting him in finding an area to pursue in education that reflected his talents. Peter stated:

So you know, for about 10 years before, my wife had told me, you belong as a college teacher, and I said no. Now I get to teach college, it's wonderful, I love it and that's where I belong. So since when I got the doctorate in '94, I started teaching college. I never taught anywhere else, so it was her who really told me. I didn't know it was really an amazing thing.

Paul and Esther were the only 2 participants who used career services to determine which area within their calling to pursue. Paul had previously completed a degree in law, following the suggestion of his wife's friends. However, he decided to return to teaching after completing his degree. After his teaching position was eliminated, his wife suggested he become a practicing attorney. The suggestions from his wife's friends and his wife reflected the experiences reported by both Elizabeth and Peter, who relied significantly on input from important people in their own lives. However, Paul did

not know which area within law to pursue. He went to the career services office at the law school and explored the various specialties in law. Paul reported that he became enthralled with either health law or legal services. As described below, he made the decision to apply for a position as a defense attorney, which he received. His faith was integral in his decision to pursue a career as a defense attorney along with the resources of career services. He believed his calling was to help people in need, and it guided his decision to pursue a career as a public defender. Paul stated:

My wife [was] like, you know, you really should think of . . . would you really ever want to do this? Would you really ever want to practice law? I went down to the law school and went to career services and looked at all the different job options. The only thing I had any interest to me was in the health interests and was either working legal services. That's what I went down for, and there happened to be a job listed in the public defender's office. I applied for it and got that. There was only very few legal jobs that I would even consider. I would have worked in civil rights, or I would have worked as a public defender. I didn't do it to make money. It was not a consideration; even when I was in law school, that was no consideration of that. I took things that interested me, that were always in the public interest. So I saw that God had, had sort of a . . . that I was going to work in the public interest that was my overall calling and has helped guide me to my choices.

Esther indicated she initially was a premed major in college, but decided not to pursue it due to a personal problem in college, which led to a decrease in grades. However, she knew she wanted to pursue a career in healthcare, but was uncertain which



area to specialize in. She sought the services of a career counselor located at a community college near her parents' residence. Esther was administered a variety of tests, such as the Strong Interest Inventory and "personal preference." The results suggested that three professions reflected her gifts, interests, and personality style: nursing, pharmacy, and social work. Esther ruled out pursuing a career in social work because the salary was not sufficient, but she decided against pharmacy because she desired more patient contact. She desired a career in which she could financially support herself and serve God and his people. She volunteered at the hospital and spoke with various people in the healthcare profession. After some time, she decided to pursue a career in nursing. However, Esther incorporated her faith into the career decision-making process. She reported praying and participated in a Christian interdenominational fellowship at the hospital where she volunteered. However, she clearly articulated the importance of being proactive in finding a calling. Esther described this as follows:

I started doing volunteer work at the hospital. I was involved in a Christian interdenominational fellowship I started doing. Looking into more things and talking to different people in health professions. I went to see this counselor . . . it wasn't that I didn't sit in my room and say, "OK, God, what do you want me to do." I wasn't waiting for the telephone call from God to say, this is what I want you do to with your life.

### *Openness to Hearing the Call*

Openness to experience a calling emerged as a very important element in the process of finding a calling; for the participants in this study, prayer and the other resources previously discussed were not enough to determine a calling. Being open to their faith as well as exploring a variety of career possibilities while determining a vocation was essential.

One of the aspects of being open to receiving a calling was having a relationship with God. The relationship with God was integral to determining the specific way God desired individuals to use their gifts and talents to serve Him and His people. The participants discussed communicating with God and asking Him for direction. They also reported leaving their concerns to God because He would guide them. Esther stated:

I guess it would go back to from when I made the altar call to committing my life to Christ, to really seeking the Lord, and saying, ok, where do I go from here.

What is it that I should be doing with my life? How do you want me to serve you?

I think that's the way it works. The way we communicate with God is that we open ourselves to Him, but then we seek Him and seek His will.

Judith also articulated the importance of having a relationship with God.

However, she emphasized listening to God. Listening was important to hear God's call.

Judith stated:

Going back to church on a regular basis and listening. It sounds so stupid, but just taking the time to listen, like, OK, God, I have no idea what I'm doing. Give me some direction, and things will fall into place. And I guess that's the sort of thing that developed. Not in the getting. I think it's in listening. The listening to the

calling has helped overtime. How directed I really was when I stopped to listen and to think about the calling. So I guess how directed you really are when you give yourself the chance to listen. To listen to your calling, whatever the calling is. I think everybody is directed, but you don't necessarily want to listen to it.

In addition, the participants discussed being open to the process of finding a calling. The participants noted the importance of trying a variety of careers and choosing the one that best reflects the individual's gifts and talents. It was important to have patience and perseverance during this time in order to avoid settling into a career that may not be the best fit. It was equally integral to let go of controlling the situation and wanting things a specific way. The participants discussed allowing the process of searching for a calling to take place and having God guide individuals through it as well as being proactive. Charles commented:

When I let go of things I would have to happen my way or no way. In 1996, I think all that time I became more open. But I guess it took a lot of praying and a lot of patience and, you know, not trying to force it into something that I didn't belong to.

Furthermore, part of the process of being open to searching for a calling is being aware of one's weaknesses. This required a level of introspection in which people recognize what they may or may not be good at. Charles and Peter emphasized this during the interview.

*Events That Led to the Calling*

Thus far, the themes discussed have focused on having a relationship with God and being proactive, such as exploring a variety of occupations in order to determine a calling. However, some callings might emerge as the result of situations or specific events. For Charity and Elizabeth, for example, the events that led to their calling were perceived as God providing them with direction.

Charity reported during the interview that she initially had a desire to teach second grade when she began her vocation. However, an unexpected position became available for the sixth grade, and the principal offered Charity the opportunity to teach that grade. This situation led to other opportunities to teach older children, and eventually she was offered a position at a Catholic high school. Charity credited the aforementioned experience as leading her to discover her calling to teach adolescents because she had the talent to relate to their struggles. She reported she understood her students' struggles of being in a single-parent household and not having a father present due to losing her father when she was 14 years old. Charity commented:

Ironically, when I was at [name] university, I thought I wanted to be a second grade, like early primary grades. God help us all. I could remember that I got this teaching position, and then the principal calls me like 3 days before, because I'm like excited. I'm going to teach these kids to make first communion. I just had this little vision, you know. The principal said to me that the sixth-grade teacher is sick. You need to teach sixth grade. I'm like, what, what? "You have to teach sixth grade. I've found someone to teach second grade, but I need someone to teach the sixth." That was my calling. Otherwise, I would've been miserable in

second grade. I would have been miserable. I would not have been an effective second-grade teacher. I have this sixth grade, and then from there, I went to seventh grade, eighth grade, and then finally, I went to where I am right now in high school. My calling is to work with kids from age 14 to 18. Somehow in that age group that's where I have my niche. I definitely think that I have the ability to understand them and to relate to them. Maybe because my own experience: losing my dad and going through that vulnerable period of time without him. I can certainly relate to their pain.

As in the case of Charity, Elizabeth emphasized the idea that certain opportunities may present themselves unexpectedly, and these opportunities may lead to a calling. Elizabeth discussed the nun at her parish who had approached her to lead the children's liturgy program. In addition, she became the volunteer coordinator; her responsibilities include assisting in the soap kitchen once a month with the youth group. She became responsible for this event after the original coordinator left the position. Elizabeth stated: "I think I was just fortunate, and the timing and the situations just presented themselves. Some of them I recognized and I pick up on, like the youth group, and others presented to me."

### *Following the Calling*

As noted earlier, most of the participants struggled with their calling. The struggle with the calling was multifaceted. Some of the participants actively engaged in the difficult task of finding their calling while others tried to distance themselves from it. Despite some participants' efforts to move away from their calling, they felt drawn to it.

These participants reported being continually pulled back into their calling by accepting jobs that were similar to their calling. Eventually, they decided to pursue their calling, which coincided with their return to the Church. This theme encompasses the participants' experiences in following their calling.

Judith was 1 of the participants who did not initially follow her calling. However, she reported a strong connection to her calling at times when she did not pursue it. This was evident in her decision to receive jobs that reflected her calling to become a teacher such as being a teacher's assistant. She returned to college to receive a degree in teaching and withdrew from school again. Eventually, she returned and followed her calling. She reengaged in her faith, which led her to pursue her calling.

In addition, Charles indicated he became active in the church, developed a relationship with God, and prayed to God to assist him in determining his calling. Charles believed reengaging in his faith led to him to experience a call to become a mental health caseworker. As noted above, Charles was the only participant who did not know his calling early on. However, his reengagement in the Church led him to find his calling. This was similar to the participants who initially knew their calling, but followed it upon reengaging in their faith.

*Feelings associated with following the calling.* The theme following the calling produced one subtheme, which was feelings. The subtheme explored the emotions the participants experienced when they decided to pursue their vocation. The participants described a mixed of emotions. Some of the participants discussed experiencing doubts and anxiety when they made the decision to follow their calling. The doubts focused on whether they could achieve their calling. Despite the doubts, the participants had a sense

that they were going in the right direction and felt they had made the right decision. The doubts dissipated with time and were replaced with calmness. Esther commented:

Again because I was really, very happy, when I got to the point. Not to say there weren't moments of stress and doubt. It's like you're driving on a road and it's foggy and you know you're going the right way, but you could only see so far, but you know. There's just some . . . you know you're on the right road. It's just a sense that you have.

Judith expressed doubt and anxiety about following her calling. However, she emphasized that there was a long process to reach a moment in her life in which she felt calmness and the anxiety dissipated. She commented:

In some, and again this is more recent, I guess at first I would say questioning. There's a questioning, there's doubt, like am I really meant to do this. Again, how am I going to achieve this, this is crazy, you can't do this. And then I think later on there's calmness. There's a security in that you know almost more than anything you're ever known before this is what you're meant to do. There's calmness. So you go from this is crazy irrational, oh wow how can I be doing this, to a secure calmness. This is where I need to be. This is where I am. This is where I'm going to find happiness and make an impact on people.

Charles also discussed experiencing continued doubts about his calling. However, he reflected on Mother Teresa's experience of working through her doubts about her calling for inspiration to follow his calling. Charles stated: "I had a featured Mother Teresa . . . she had doubts, but she always continued working through those doubts and I just being able to do that."

Paul reported he felt overwhelmed by his calling because he sometimes did not receive the results he desired as a public defender. He commented:

Absolutely, you have to keep pushing forward; it can be overwhelming at times.

In working as a public defender, you lose a lot, and you know, sometimes it really hurts because you've done everything that you could possibly do, but still you don't get the result for that person.

In addition, the participants reported feeling calm, wonderful, warm feeling, love it, where I belong, happiness, peace, feels right, good, humble, satisfying rewarding, exciting, enthusiasm, comfortable, touching, and amazing. Elizabeth stated:

I'm like, this is just so wonderful. I get so much more out of it than I put into it.

Then it came to me, oh, okay I'm not only helping these children; I'm being helped as well. It's a very gradual thing. Again, it's not something that just hits you, but it's such as wonderful feeling.

### *Impact of the Calling on the Participants*

Once the participants had accepted and engaged in their calling, the participants were affected in different ways. For example, Judith and Esther reported having direction and stability in their lives. Charles indicated his calling led to an increase in his self-esteem, strength, and faith. He reported maintaining a dedication to the Church and took a role in the Church, as sacristan. Charles stated:

The nice thing I would have to say as far as faith goes, I've still maintained my level of dedication. I still go to church every week, I'm still a Eucharistic minister, and ever since then I've become a sacristan. So I've actually increased. I



wasn't like, thank you, God, I'll see you later. It was more, okay, it was very gracious. I was king of gracious for the experience, you that, okay, this is what I had to do to get there, and this is what I've got to continue to do to hold on to things.

Two of the participants indicated their calling did not change their lives. Peter indicated the calling had always been a part of his life; therefore, the calling did not represent a change for him. Paul stated that he probably would not have become an attorney if his teaching position had not been eliminated. However, he did not believe his life changed by switching his full-time career from teaching to being a lawyer because he viewed his calling in a broader way, as serving and helping others, and thus, he, similar to Peter, had always been engaged in the form of work he was called to do.

### *Indirect Effects*

Not all of the effects of the calling on the participants were directly related to their work. The subtheme indirect effects reflect the emotions some participants had in response to how their calling affected other peoples' lives (the effects on others are discussed in more detail in the next section). For example, Peter was happy with his decision with his calling to become a teacher, but felt sad because of the disagreements he had with his parents regarding his chosen profession. In addition, Esther reported feeling ambivalent about her calling because it altered her parents' lives. Although she felt happy with pursuing her calling to become a nurse, wife, and mother, it led her to feel ambivalent about her calling because her parents had changed their retirement plans in order to assist her in raising her children. Esther described this as follows:

I guess it in some ways I was ambivalent because I guess I know my parents initially were disappointed because this is what . . . it all turned their plans from them on from what they thought their retirements was going to be. I was very happy because I was doing everything that I dreamed I would be doing professionally and personally.

### *Impact of the Calling on Others*

As introduced in the subtheme indirect effects, some of the participants felt ambivalent about their calling due to their families' reaction to their career choice. The theme impact of the calling on other people in the participants' lives involved ways in which their vocation affected their families. For most of the participants, their families initially did not approve of their chosen profession. For example, Peter indicated he had arguments with his parents about his calling because they did not approve of his decision to become a teacher. His parents wanted him to follow a career in industry. However, he believed his parents had become more accepting of his calling now than they had been in the past. Peter stated that his parents were proud of him because he recently published a book and was a college professor. He stated:

Well, I can tell you my parents thought I was a jerk. I should get a job in industry because they are a lot more stable. They're a lot more, it a lot more stable life, you get benefits, you get job security, you get everything. Sometimes we were shouting at each other, wouldn't talk for days. We would be, we talked earnestly about how you're making a mistake. They certainly given me a lot of flak for my calling, but ultimately they agreed it was my life and I could do as I pleased with

it. They've ultimately have been proud of me, and Mom does think I've done well for myself. She's very proud of the fact that I just published a book and very proud of the fact that I got my doctorate and that I am teaching at a college. My dad says the same thing, more or less. He's little more accepting nowadays than he had been years ago. I think he's very proud of me, too, and happy that I've done what I've done.

Esther stated her parents were happy with her decision to attend nursing school. However, they were concerned when she made the decision to accept an offer to work as a nurse in another town. Esther's parents believed that her move to another town was a temporary situation, and within 1 year, they would all move to a different state where her parents intended to retire. However, within 1 year she was engaged to be married. Her parents sold their home in the state they were going to retire to.

Judith's parents also initially disapproved of her calling. She discussed how her parents were concerned about whether she would be able to support herself on a teacher's salary. In addition, Judith's calling did not reflect the career her family pursued. Judith stated her family had careers in business, and her calling did not reflect her family's profession. With time, her father accepted her calling, after he accepted an offer to become an adjunct professor. This experience assisted him in recognizing the influence teachers have with students, and as a result, he understood Judith's decision to become a teacher. It is important to note that Judith emphasized that her mother was always supportive of her decision to pursue her calling, but "she took a more backseat role." Judith believed her calling helped her family to become more accepting of others for who

they are and not maintain the notion that everyone had to follow the same path. Judith stated:

It's funny; I think my father has finally accepted that this is where I need to be. As I said, he's in the business world, a lot of my siblings are in the business world, and he recently took a job teaching. He was an adjunct professor, and he came to me after the second week of school, and he said, "Oh my God, I have a much better appreciation of what you do," and then at the end of the semester, he said, "It's such an amazing job to have that impact," and I said, "Yeah, Dad, that's what I love about this, the effect that you have." So I think that for a long time he really didn't understand my calling or my need to be a teacher to do this and up until recently, and then recently when he had this experience he has a much better appreciation. I think it was more out of fear for survival, how is this girl going to survive. So I think it was more a parental instinct for him, you have to get a job where you can support yourself type of thing.

Charity indicated her mother was delighted with her decision, and in fact, it influenced her mother to return to school and to receive her high school diploma at 60.

Charity said:

Oh my mother was delighted. My mother always wanted to be a teacher herself, but she was the oldest of 6 girls and her father died when she was 14, the irony of this. She would tell me about the one teacher in her life that touched her so that she herself wanted to teach.

### *Summary*

The results of the study indicated the participants experienced a long process characterized by the following themes: questioning their faith, returning to the Church, being pulled by God, struggles with their calling, and the impact of their calling. Six of the 7 participants indicated they questioned their faith due to an event or series of events that occurred. As a result, 5 out of the 7 participants left the Church. However, they eventually returned to the Church due to influence from friends, priest, and/or a significant other.

The participants described the calling as being directed by God. The calling emphasized service to God and His people. The participants also reported that the calling reflected their gifts, talents, and personality style. In addition, there were two aspects of a calling and a career decision. First, some of the participants knew their calling, but did not initially follow it because they experienced doubts. The doubts about their calling corresponded with questioning their faith. However, they reported being continually pulled back into their calling by receiving jobs that were similar to their calling, such as being a teacher's assistant. This may be due to the participants experiencing persistent thoughts and feelings about their calling, which dissipated when they made the commitment to pursue it. When they engaged in their faith, they followed their calling. It was important to note that Charles was the only participant who did not know his calling early on in life. He explored various careers. However, when he made the decision to reengage in his faith and develop a relationship with God, Charles experienced a call to his career. Second, once the participants followed their calling, some wondered about

which area within their calling to pursue. This reflected the experience of struggling to find a calling.

The participants indicated they used a variety of resources to determine their calling, such as prayer. In addition, some of the participants believed God provided their calling through others. They indicated they received suggestions from significant others and friends on careers to pursue that reflected their gifts and talents. Furthermore, Esther and Paul used career services to determine which area within their calling to pursue. However, these participants incorporated their faith into the career decision-making process.

The participants indicated it was important to be open to the process of determining a calling. The participants discussed being open to God and seeking His will. A relationship with God and listening to Him was important in determining a calling. However, the participants discussed the importance of being proactive. They emphasized the notion of exploring a variety of careers in order to determine which profession would be appropriate. Moreover, the participants reflected on the specific events that led to their calling. Some of the participants indicated that opportunities and specific situations presented themselves that led to the participants' calling.

The participants reported a variety of feelings associated with the struggle with their calling such as depression and unhappiness. Once the participants followed their calling, they expressed feelings such as happiness and peacefulness. In addition, some of the participants discussed having doubts and anxiety about their calling when they followed it. Although some of the participants reported they questioned their calling, and therefore, did not initially follow it, the doubts were present when the participants

decided to follow their calling. However, it was a long process to reach a moment in which they felt calmness and the anxiety dissipated. The participants believed they made the right decision to follow their calling. However, they had to work through their doubts. Charles reflected on a Catholic figure such as Mother Teresa for inspiration because she also questioned her calling as a nun.

The participants indicated they and their families were affected by their calling. For example, Charles reported an increase in faith. Esther felt ambivalent about her calling because her family altered their retirement plans. Peter and Judith discussed how their families expressed concern about how they would support themselves and their chosen career was different from what the family had hoped for. Eventually, all families accepted the participants' calling because of the satisfaction and happiness they experienced.

## CHAPTER V

### Discussion

Chapter 5 discusses the relationship with the themes presented in chapter 4 to the research questions and the review of the literature in chapter 2. This chapter seeks to tie the results of the data to the research questions and existing literature in order to understand the process in which people experience a call to a career. In addition, implications and recommendations for vocational psychologists are discussed. Finally, limitations and suggestions for future research are presented.

Four research questions directed the process of investigating and comprehending how people incorporate their religion to make a career decision. The research questions were the following: (a) What is the process by which individuals incorporate religion and spirituality into making a career decision? (b) How do people experience their unique call to a career? (c) What are the resources individuals use in discerning a call to a career? (d) How can vocational psychologists support individuals in the process of discerning their vocations? The research questions will be discussed based on the following themes: calling, process, and impact.

#### *Calling*

To understand the process in which the participants experienced a call to a career, calling must be defined. This has implications for practice and research because without a working definition of a calling it might be difficult for vocational psychologists to ask the appropriate questions to assess for this construct. Additionally, a clear definition of the



construct is important so that researchers are able to measure calling and its influence on career decision.

The participants' definition of a calling was similar to that of Davidson and Caddell (1994) in their study of calling with Protestants. In both studies, participants reported that the calling reflected God's plan for people and their purpose in life. The definition of calling was also similar to that proposed by Dik and Duffy (in press), who defined a calling as coming from an outside source and it appears to be rooted in the value of helping others, which motivated people and provided meaning in their lives. Dik and Duffy (in press) described the motivation as being connected to the source of the calling. The authors did not specify the "external source" (p. 6) because it may vary for individuals. It is important to note that the term Dik and Duffy use for this "life role" (p. 6) is vocation, which they view as separate from the call to that work. In the current study, the participants believed the external source who called them to their career was God, and this motivated them to follow their calling.

Although the participants in the present study provided definitions of calling that were generally consistent with the existing literature, there is a significant difference. The literature did not discuss calling as a reflection of people's gifts and talents. For the participants in the present study, a calling is not just fulfilling one's purpose in life and helping others. It is also important that individuals find the best ways to use their gifts and abilities to assist others or impact other people's lives.

The participants' definition of a calling in this study was rooted in Catholic teachings, which is understandable given the sample. Catholicism teaches that people are uniquely called to a vocation, and it reflects their gifts and talents, and these talents are

used to serve others (U.S. Catholic Conference, 1994). It appeared that the participants' Catholic faith influenced their definition of calling and perception of work or vocation. The catechism might have helped frame the participants' view of calling. The Catechism of the Catholic Church is a very important and meaningful body of work for Catholics. It provides people with information on the principles of Catholicism (1994). The catechism also provides a guideline that people can refer to on how they can live life in accordance with Catholic teachings. As a result, the Catechism of the Catholic Church might influence Catholics' worldview such as the perception of work, for example.

Charity and Paul discussed their early memories of studying the catechism. They reported memorizing the Baltimore Catechism when they were young. The Baltimore Catechism was composed of six series of books. Each book had a number assigned to it, ranging from 00 to 4. Each book pertained to a specific teaching of Catholicism. For example, book 00 discussed prayer, book 01 explored confession, book 1 referred to receiving communion, book 2 examined confirmation, book 3 pertained to receiving more information about Catholic doctrine after confirmation, and book 4 assisted people in teaching the catechism to others (Catholic Information Center, 2003). The Baltimore Catechism later changed to the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Charity and Paul remembered when the change occurred and believed it emphasized a more personal relationship with the Church and God compared to memorizing information in the Baltimore Catechism.

Although Charity and Paul were not currently reading the catechism, the principles of the Catholic faith remained with them as well as with all of the participants. The participants discussed being exposed to Catholic doctrine and teachings when they

were young. As a result of their Catholic faith, they chose careers that were service oriented such as public defender, teacher, nurse, and volunteer work. The influence of religion in the participants' career decisions reflected the existing literature describing the role of religious values in career choice (Constantine et al., 2006; Davidson & Caddell, 1994; Duffy & Blustein, 2005; Duffy & Sedlack, 2007; Lips-Wiersma, 2002; Sellers et al., 2005).

As noted above, research has defined a calling as meaningful, purposeful, deriving from an outside source, and helping others. However, the literature has not addressed the process, which includes the persistent thoughts and feelings people experience about their calling, which the participants expressed in the present study. Some of the participants frequently thought about following and felt drawn to their calling, even during periods when they were following different paths. This is important because the thoughts, feelings, and the calling itself do not disappear when it is not initially followed. The calling is present even when the participants did not follow it. The participants were aware of it due to the pull they felt to pursue their calling.

As described in chapter 4, 5 of the 7 participants left the church at one time because they questioned their faith, for various reasons, and reengaged in their calling when they returned to the Church. This will be discussed in detail in the subsequent theme, process. It is important to note that the results of this study suggest that a calling is connected to engaging in and internalizing one's religion. These findings are similar to the findings of Davidson and Caddell (1994), who reported that intrinsic religiosity or incorporating religion into one's life led to the individual perceiving work as a calling.

### *Process*

One of the things that have been missing from the literature on calling is the process through which individuals discern and begin to follow a call. Although research has shown that there is a correlation between religion and career decision (Constantine et al., 2006), there is no available information on the process in which people use their religion to make a career decision. Therefore, the theme process will discuss the following aspects of calling: struggles with the calling, following the calling, resources used, feelings associated with the calling, and the direct and indirect impact on the calling. The study has addressed this gap in the literature.

### *Struggles with the Calling*

In chapter 4, there was a discussion that some of the participants knew their calling early on but decided not to pursue it initially. Duffy and Sedlack (2007) referred to the process of knowing one's calling as the "presence of the calling" (p. 597), which may lead to a career decision. However, the article did not explore how the presence of a calling influenced career decisions. The data from the current study indicated that the calling led to a career decision, when the participants engaged or reengaged in their faith. It appears that for individuals who perceive a call from God, it is difficult to follow a call during times when the individual is disconnected from God. There is an internal struggle about whether to follow their calling. In order to follow the calling, the participants had to make amends with the conflict they had with certain aspects of their faith, which was a process. As several of the participants in the study have described, they found specific parts of their faith so central to their own identities that they could not remain

disconnected from the Church. For example, Charity cited the transubstantiation of Christ in which the bread and wine converts to the body and blood of Christ.

The individual's level of religiosity is also important in following a calling. Davidson and Caddell (1994) indicated that extrinsic religiosity, or not incorporating one's religion into his or her life, may lead the individual to perceive work as a job or career. However, intrinsic religiosity or incorporating an individual's faith into her or his life may result in the person viewing his or her work as a calling. This is supported by the present study, which found that following a call required that the individuals integrate their faith into their lives. This is also consistent with Constantine et al. (2006), who reported that intrinsic religiosity may lead individuals to include their faith in the career decision-making process.

As described in chapter 2, Duffy and Blustein (2005) conducted a quantitative study on the influence of religion and spirituality on career choice commitment and the confidence to make a decision. The findings of the study indicated that religion and spirituality only modestly influenced people's confidence in making a career decision. The findings of the present study, however, suggest that for individuals who are deeply connected to their religion (in this case, Catholicism) intrinsic religiosity can have a significant impact on the career decision process and both their confidence in and commitment to that decision.

Several factors may account for the difference in the findings. First, there was a difference in methodology between the two studies. Duffy and Blustein (2005) used a quantitative approach, which sought the statistical correlation between religion and the career decision. The scales measuring these variables contained closed-ended questions

with no opportunity for follow-up questions. Therefore, information about the process of experiencing a calling and how religion was incorporated into the career decision-making process was not explored. The current study used a qualitative methodology because it may assist researchers and psychologists in understanding the participants' experience of finding and following a calling, especially since there was a lack of studies that explored the process of experiencing this phenomenon. The open-ended questions provided the participants the opportunity to discuss not only the process but also the resources used to find a calling. The questions also encouraged the participants to discuss their thoughts, feelings, and the meaning associated with following a call.

A second factor contributing to the difference between these studies is the sample. Duffy and Blustein's sample consisted of college students who may have been in the process of determining their career decisions and the role of their religion in the process. The current study has participants who have already made career decisions and were reflecting on their experience of incorporating their religion into the process of choosing an occupation. Further, the present sample was limited to Roman Catholics and to those who self-identified as having been called to their careers by God.

The difficulties some of the participants experienced in pursuing a calling have been described above. Before pursuing a calling, individuals are often engaged in the process of determining a calling, which Duffy and Sedlack referred to as the "search for a calling" (p. 597). Finding a calling may be related to "searching for meaning and religious commitment" (p. 595). The experiences of the participants in the current study, who described struggles to both find and accept their calling, support Duffy and Sedlacek's (2007) suggestion that the search for a calling leads to career indecision while

the presence of a calling leads to career decision. Search for the calling also described the experience of some participants who wondered about which area within their calling to pursue.

The present study suggested there was a two-step process in some cases to a calling and a career decision. First, there was a process to find and follow an overall calling, which for these participants was followed by the search to determine the area within their calling to pursue. The search for the calling was present in both processes. This may lead to a secondary experience of indecision once the primary calling has been discerned, because these individuals reported a sense of struggle in exploring which area within their calling to follow. Once the individuals determined which area within their calling to pursue, it reflected what Duffy and Sedlacek described as the presence of the calling. Similar to searching for the calling, the presence of the calling occurred through a two-step process. It was present in both the overall and the specific area within the calling that the individuals followed. The presence of the calling in both processes led to career decisions. However, as discussed earlier, the degree to which participants perceived a presence or was engaged in searching fluctuated depending on where in the process the participants were.

The chapter so far has discussed being aware of and finding a calling. The examples that have been explored have pertained to one calling. However, people can experience more than one calling, as in the case of Paul. It is important to recognize that an individual may have two callings, but the process of finding and following the calling may be similar to what the participants have reported.

The concept of having more than one calling has been discussed by Sellers et al. (2005). Although the article pertains to women who felt dually called to motherhood and a career, the notion that people can have two callings can be applied to Paul's experience. In addition, Charity and Esther briefly mentioned that their calling was not limited to their careers. They reported being called or having a vocation to be a wife and mother. The other 2 female participants (Elizabeth and Judith) did not discuss this even though they were mothers. This does not mean that Elizabeth and Judith did not perceive their role as a mother as part of their calling. They responded to the questions regarding their calling as it related to their career decision while Charity and Esther gave broad answers about their calling, which included their roles as a wife and mother.

Another finding of the present study was that not all callings are paid work. For example, Elizabeth identified her calling as volunteer work. Mattis et al. (2000) reported similar findings in their study on volunteerism as a form of work, which they found was influenced by intrinsic religiosity.

### *Resources*

The participants used an array of resources, such as prayer, to resolve the ambivalence described earlier. They reported communicating with God and asking for direction. This was similar to the findings of Lips-Wiersma (2002) in which people used prayer for guidance and strength. However, Lips-Wiersma did not discuss the importance of listening to God in order to hear the calling, which was a point the participants in the current study discussed. Some of the participants in the present study, specifically Judith,



Elizabeth, and Charity, emphasized the importance of listening to God in order to determine a calling.

The suggestions from others were also a very important resource in finding a calling. In many cases, friends and spouses suggested careers that reflected the participants' gifts and talents. This also went beyond simply receiving advice from others; rather, some of the participants indicated that God provided the calling through other people. Only 2 participants sought the assistance of a career center. However, these 2 participants incorporated their religion into the career decision-making process, for example, through prayer.

The process of determining a calling is not limited to prayer and having a relationship with God. Waiting for God to answer an individual's prayer may not lead to a calling, according to the participants in the present study. For many of the participants in the present study, incorporating prayer in and being proactive in the career decision-making process were important. Being proactive requires volunteering and trying a variety of careers to determine which one will be the best fit, which some of the participants reported in the study. Exploring various careers is part of being open to the process of finding a career in order to avoid choosing a profession that may not reflect one's gifts and talents, as some of the participants recommended. It is important to recognize that not all callings are revealed through trying a variety of careers. In some instances, an individual may become aware of a calling as a result of situations or opportunities that may arise. In Charity's case, she indicated the unexpected opportunity to teach sixth grade early on in her career when she desired to teach second grade led to

other prospects to teach older children, and eventually she was offered a position as a high school teacher.

The process the participants used to determine a calling was similar in some ways to traditional vocational psychology. First, a central component of traditional vocational psychology is trait-factor theory, which emphasizes choosing a career that reflects an individual's abilities, personality style, and values (Swanson & Fouad, 1999). As discussed earlier, Catholic vocation emphasizes using one's gifts and talents to serve God and His people (U.S. Catholic Conference, 1994). Second, both the discernment process and vocational psychology require individuals to engage in introspection. The participants reflected on their talents to determine how best to use them to serve others. Esther infused traditional vocational psychology with her discernment process. She incorporated the information she received from her career counselor with prayer to determine her calling.

*Feelings associated with the calling.* The participants discussed a variety of feelings associated with struggling with the calling (or what Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007, referred to as search for a calling) such as unhappiness and feeling unfilled. Once they followed their calling, however, they described feeling happy and peaceful. However, as mentioned earlier, some of the participants discussed feeling doubt and anxiety when they decided to follow their calling. Duffy and Sedlack (2007) expressed uncertainty about whether the presence of the calling led to people feeling comfortable with their career decisions. Although some of the participants in the current study expressed doubts when they made the decision to pursue their callings, they felt comfortable with their decision. The doubts appeared to have been related to whether they had the ability or

skills to follow their calling. Duffy and Blustein (2005) discussed the influence of religion on people's confidence in making career decisions. The authors believed that intrinsic religiosity provided people with the "stability and support" (p. 437) to make a career decision. This may have been the case with the participants in the current study because they followed their calling despite doubts. The participants' religion may have provided them with the support to follow their calling. Charles alluded to this idea when he discussed the influence of Mother Teresa, who had doubts about her calling but worked through it, in following his calling.

The doubts may not have been limited to the level of religiosity. They may have been due to concerns about whether the participants could attain their calling. Duffy and Sedlack (2007) noted that being aware of a calling did not equate to knowing the necessary steps to attain the calling. This was the case with some of the participants in the present study who questioned how they would accomplish their calling, but it was also connected to confidence and self-esteem, as discussed above. The doubts about the calling may be part of the process. Neafsey (2004) noted that there may be moments of doubts and questioning about the calling. The most important aspect was the recognition that some of the participants' doubts did not lead them to regret their decision to follow their calling. They knew they had made the right choice.

### *Impact*

The impact of the calling on participants' lives has not been fully explored in the existing literature. The reason is that most of the literature discusses the relationship between religion and career decision, but does not address the calling after the individual

enters the work to which she or he has been called. This section will seek to address this gap in the literature.

The impact of the decision to follow a calling was a different experience for each of the participants. Not all of the participants had the same experience in terms of the impact of the calling in their lives. Judith and Esther reported that they felt stability and direction while Charles expressed an increase in faith. Peter and Paul both indicated that the calling did not affect their lives. Peter believed the calling did not change his life because it was part of his life. Paul believed the calling did not impact his life when he made the decision to become a practicing attorney after his teaching position was eliminated because he was still helping others. It was interesting that Peter and Paul stated that their calling did not significantly impact their lives although they discussed how following their calling made them feel satisfied and happy. It appeared as though their calling impacted their lives because of the positive feelings attributed to their calling.

The participants discussed how their calling affected their families' lives; for example, their families initially did not approve of their calling. Esther and Peter felt ambivalence about their calling as a result of changes in their parents' lives and parental disapproval. Although the lack of parental and family support did not affect the participants' decision to follow their calling, it was difficult to not have received initial support from their families. The participants' experience with their parents' reaction was similar to what Sellers et al. (2005) reported. They indicated that participants in their study received formative messages from their families regarding their calling, and the participants in this study reported that some of the messages were discouraging. Although

Sellers et al.'s study focused on the messages of women being dually called to a career and motherhood, the concept of receiving dispiriting messages about a calling from their families can be transferred to the current study, in which some participants also initially received disappointing messages from their families.

### *Implications for Vocational Psychologists*

The present study has implications for vocational psychologists. First, the study provides a definition of calling from the perspective of a group of individuals who have heard a call. The available literature discusses the relationship between religion and career decisions, but few articles define calling, and those that do offer a definition are not consistent with each other. The definition of a calling as described by the participants in this study can assist researchers in further refining the construct of calling, which will assist vocational psychologists in developing appropriate scales that adequately measure calling and vocation.

Second, the study described a process through which individuals may use their religion in making a career decision. This discussion of a process is lacking in the literature, and the information from the study can aid vocational psychologists in understanding the process of determining a calling. The findings of the study suggested that the calling was not direct for some of the participants. Some of the participants knew their calling early on, but initially did not follow it. Questioning their faith coincided with doubting their calling. The level of religiosity was integral in whether people followed their calling. In other words, when some of the participants questioned their faith and left the Church, they did not follow their calling. When they engaged in their faith, they

followed their calling. This information may assist vocational psychologists in understanding how struggles with religious faith might affect the career decision-making process.

In addition, the data suggested that some people may know their overall calling, but may not know which area within the calling to follow. Clients may seek the assistance of a vocational psychologist to assist them through this process. Moreover, in some sense the process of determining the calling was very similar to traditional vocational psychology. The participants reported engaging in introspection by reflecting on their gifts and talents and how best to use them to serve others. Traditional vocational psychology also promotes introspection and exploring a variety of professions that reflect people's personality style, values, and abilities.

Understanding the process of determining a calling can assist vocational psychologists in encouraging their clients who are intrinsically religious to incorporate some of the resources discussed in the study, such as prayer and developing a relationship with God, to determine their calling or make a career decision. In addition, vocational psychologists might encourage their clients to work with their priests in determining a calling. Furthermore, it is important to note that the process of finding a calling may not be limited to paid work. The calling may be reflected in volunteer work while having a career that is not related to their calling, as in the case with Elizabeth.

Third, the study provides information to vocational psychologists about the emotional experience of the process of determining and following a calling. As noted earlier, the participants displayed an array of emotions during this process ranging from unhappiness to ambivalence. This may be present with clients who seek the assistance of

a vocational psychologist. Clients' emotions may range from confusion to sadness when clients are trying to determine their calling. The clients may also feel happiness about finding their calling as well as ambivalence due to their parents' reaction. Vocational psychologists can assist clients in developing skills to effectively cope with the range of emotions clients might experience as they go through this process of deciding and committing to their calling.

### *Limitations*

There were several limitations to the study. First, the study was conducted with only Roman Catholics. Although this addressed the gap in the literature, given that the majority of research on calling and career has been conducted with Protestants, the population of this study limits its generalizability. Second, all of the participants were Caucasian, which also limits the generalizability of the study. Third, the sample size of 7 participants is rather small but typical of qualitative studies. In qualitative studies, the recruiting process continues until saturation or no new information is revealed (Creswell, 1998). However, this limits the generalizability of the study.

Fourth, the sample selection acts as a limitation to the study. The participants in the study were reflecting on their past experience of being called to a career. On one hand, this was helpful because they discussed the process of finding and following their calling as well as the resources used. This information could assist vocational psychologists in understanding the process. On the other hand, this posed a limitation because the participants might have had a different perspective compared to those who are currently in the process of finding their calling.

In addition, the participants self-identified and, overall, were happy with their calling. People who feel called to their careers but are unhappy may not participate in this type of study. Furthermore, people who believe that God is responsible for all of their life decisions probably will not volunteer for a study like this, because these individuals may believe that a relationship with God and prayer alone will lead to their calling. They might not incorporate faith into exploring career options through researching or volunteering occupations of interest to determine a calling. It is as though they might have no control over or responsibility for their lives because God does. God controls what occurs in people's lives. As a result, people may not feel a sense of responsibility for struggles in finding their calling or choosing a career that does not reflect their skills and personality. This refers to an external locus of control in which people believe they are not in command of their lives. Locus of control can influence career decisions. People who have an external locus of control may not be active in the career decision-making process because they believe that outside circumstances have power over their occupational choice (Bright, Pryor, & Harpham 2005). Therefore, the findings of the present study may be limited because the participants were happy with their calling and had a balance between faith and being proactive in exploring their career options.

Finally, in qualitative studies, researcher bias is part of the methodology and cannot be completely eliminated. I took steps to decrease bias such as bracketing, peer debriefing, and having a member of my dissertation committee assist in analysis of the data. These processes were helpful in decreasing the influence of my biases on the study. Despite these techniques, qualitative research is always affected by the researcher's own characteristics and experiences.



### *Recommendations for Future Research*

The study has discussed the process through which people experience a call to a career, which has addressed a gap in the literature. However, this study as well as existing research has primarily explored the influence of Christian religions on the career decision-making process. Future research should explore the process of experiencing the calling with Muslims, Jews, as well as participants in Eastern religions, such as Hindus and Buddhists. In addition, it is crucial to explore the process through which these religions influence career choice, and how members of these religious groups experience a call to a career.

Further, it is possible that a call to serve a higher purpose can be secular in origin, and that should also be addressed. Future studies should also contain a cross-cultural sample to examine the influence of nonreligious elements of culture on religion and career decision. While some studies have included multicultural samples (e.g., Constantine et al., 2006), the existing research has not fully addressed the process of determining a vocation. Culture may influence how people experience a call to a career, and therefore replicating the present study with a culturally diverse sample is essential for a more complete understanding of the experience of being called to a vocation.

Future research should examine calling and mid-life career change. The participants in this study have remained in or followed their calling for years, but the vocational literature suggests that individuals may reevaluate their career choice in mid-life. The study by Gottfredson (1977) was one of the very few articles that had a range of age groups that included a middle-age sample in discussing career change. The author discussed career stability and change with adults as these issues related to Holland's work

personality style. The review of the article focused on the section of mid-life career change. The article indicated that most people in the study who changed careers remained within the same type of work. Some participants in the study changed to a career that was completely different from their previous occupation. Some of the men switched from a realistic occupation (working with tangible things such as being a plumber) to an enterprising career (having an administrative position at a company). Meanwhile, the women switched from enterprising and realistic occupations to conventional careers, which provide more structure in terms of working hours and work responsibilities. The article did not discuss the reason for the mid-life career change, which is important to examine. Conducting future research with a middle-age sample can assist vocational psychologists in understanding the process of experiencing a call for those who have had a mid-life career change.

Moreover, future research should examine the influence of external events such as job burnout or downsizing on people's decisions to begin the process of exploring or finding a calling. Maslach and Leiter (2008) examined the predictors of job burnout and work engagement. The study found that one of the most important factors in predicting burnout was the lack of equality in the work environment, such as preferential treatment among the staff. As a result, people may develop negative feelings toward their job while those who are not concerned about the lack of equality at work engage in their jobs. The article recommended companies address people's concerns about their working environment in order to decrease burnout and increase engagement. This is important because there is always a risk of job burnout leading to career change.

Rudisill and Edwards (2002) discussed how people can handle job change. The article indicated that downsizing was one of the main reasons people lose their jobs. During this time, people have to cope with the job loss as well as decide on their next career path. People may feel overwhelmed as well as a loss of a sense of self. Psychologists can assist people in discussing their thoughts and feelings about the job loss and in the career decision-making process. Since downsizing and job burnout may lead to career change, future research should examine the role of these external events in people engaging in finding a calling.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Protocol

Hello! My name is Esperanza, and I am a fifth-year doctoral student at Seton Hall University. Before we begin, I want to check to ensure that this time is okay for us to meet and talk for about an hour. I will be asking you some questions about your experience of being called to a career. I'd like to remind you that I will be taping this interview. Although the interview is being taped, please know that this interview is confidential. Any personally identifying information will be eliminated from the eventual transcript of this taped interview. In addition, no information will be shared with anyone outside the research team. Do you have any questions before we begin the interview?

1. Describe your faith/relationship with God.
2. What are your earliest memories of being Catholic?
3. How did your parents influence your religious/spiritual development?
4. How would you define the term calling?
5. What are you called to do?
6. How are you using your calling?
  - What are your gifts/talents?
7. Describe your experience of being called.
8. What resources did you use in discerning your calling (e.g., seeking the assistance of a priest, prayer, reading the Bible)?
9. What feelings were generated by the experience of being called?
10. What thoughts about the experience stood out for you?
11. How did the experience impact your life?
12. How did the experience affect significant people in your life?
  - How did it make you feel?
13. What else would you like to tell me, that I haven't asked about



## Appendix B

## Demographic Sheet

Please check or write your responses to the following questions.

1. Please identify your race and/or ethnicity. \_\_\_\_\_
2. Gender  
\_\_\_\_ Male    \_\_\_\_ Female
3. Age \_\_\_\_\_
4. What is your occupation? \_\_\_\_\_
5. How long have you been employed in your occupation?  
\_\_\_\_ Years    \_\_\_\_ Months
6. Please list volunteer activities you are involved in. \_\_\_\_\_
7. How many hours a month do you dedicate to volunteer activities? \_\_\_\_\_
8. At what age did you experience your calling? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Have you converted to Catholicism? \_\_\_\_\_
10. What age did you convert to Catholicism? \_\_\_\_\_
11. What led to your conversion? \_\_\_\_\_
12. What is your parents' religion? \_\_\_\_\_
13. Please indicate how often you attend mass. \_\_\_\_\_
13. Please list the church activities you are involved in. \_\_\_\_\_
14. How many hours a month do you dedicate to church activities? \_\_\_\_\_